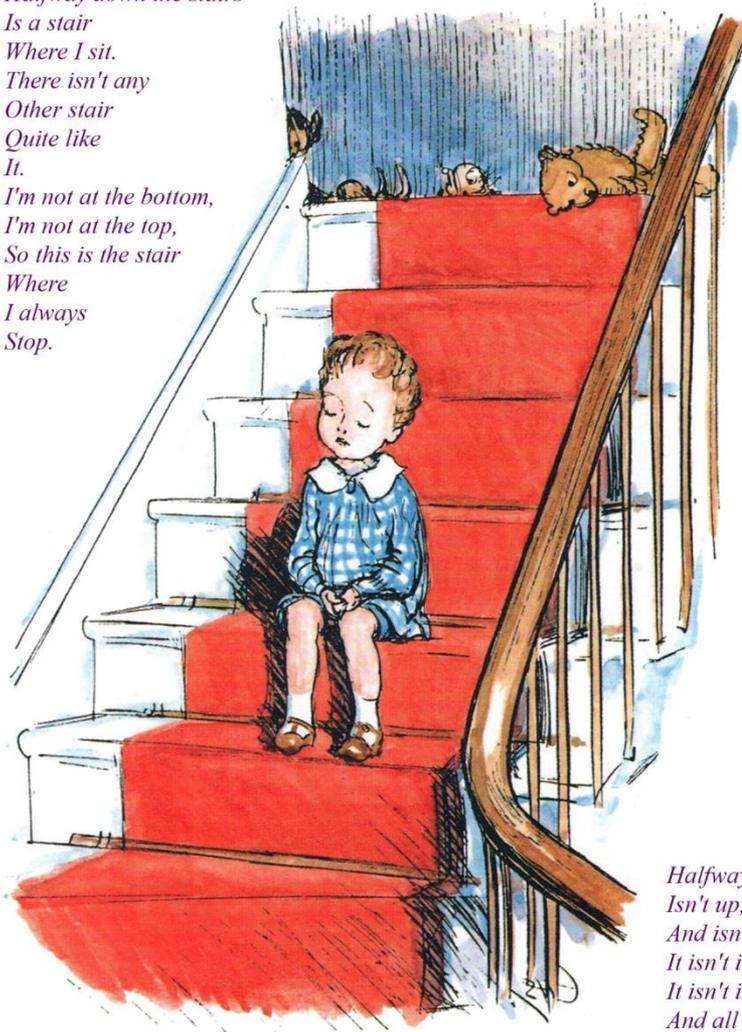


# Human Enhancement: A Middle Way?



Gregory E. Kaebnick  
The Hastings Center

*Halfway down the stairs  
 Is a stair  
 Where I sit.  
 There isn't any  
 Other stair  
 Quite like  
 It.  
 I'm not at the bottom,  
 I'm not at the top,  
 So this is the stair  
 Where  
 I always  
 Stop.*



*Halfway up the stairs  
 Isn't up,  
 And isn't down.  
 It isn't in the nursery,  
 It isn't in the town.  
 And all sorts of funny  
 Thoughts  
 Run round my head:  
 'It isn't really  
 Anywhere!  
 It's somewhere else  
 Instead!'*

# Human Enhancement: A Middle Way?

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- What are the possibilities?
- Why do it?
- Why have misgivings?
- Can we value nature?
- What should public policy look like?

What are the possibilities?

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# Targets and technologies

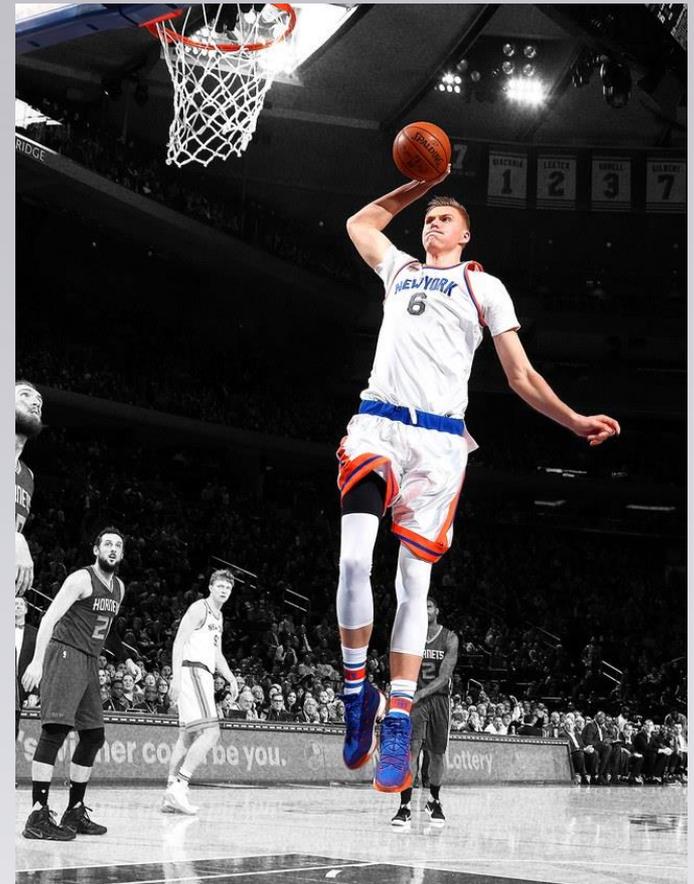
- Physical enhancements—taller, stronger, more attractive, longer lived
- Behavioral enhancements—happier, smarter, more virtuous
- Pharmacology
- Surgery
- Human-machine integration
- Genome modification, somatic and germline

# Moral enhancement

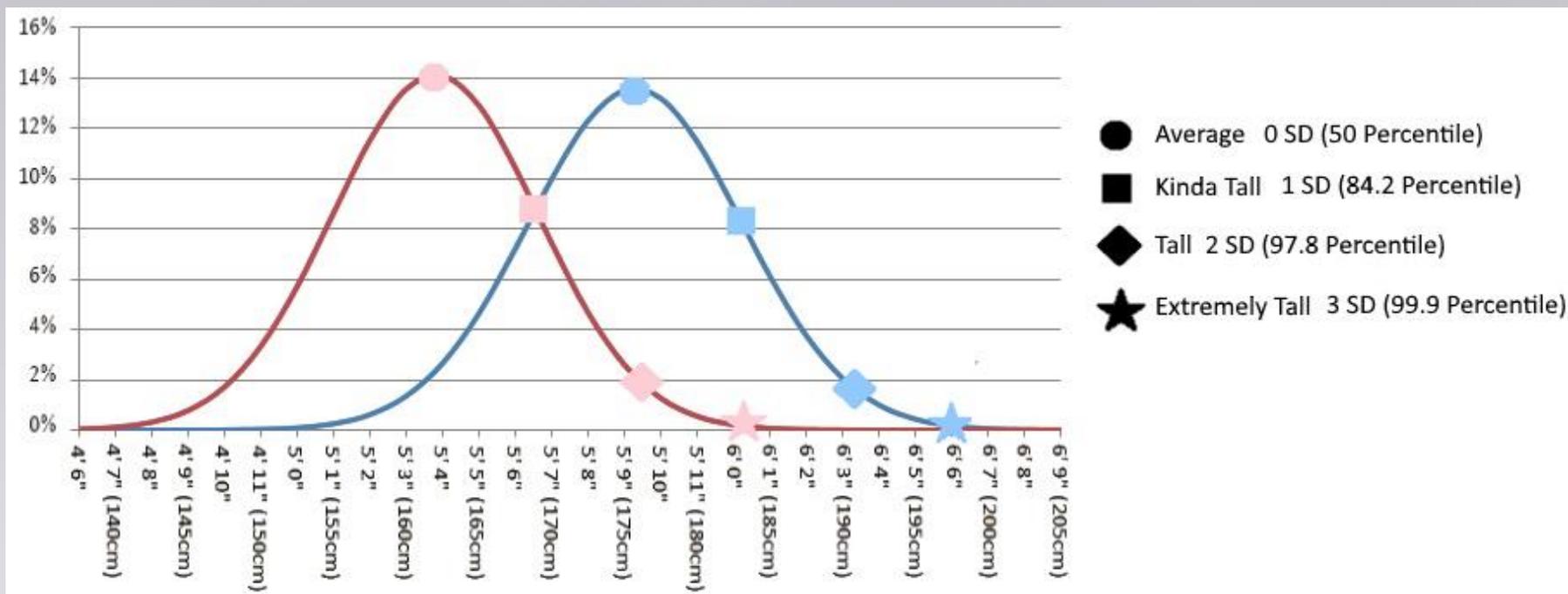
- “Mind control”?
- Cognitive enhancements
- Moral dispositions such as altruism

# Distinctions and challenges

- Does an enhancement necessarily make life better?
- Enhancement vs. therapy
- The baseline: “normal” bodies vs. “given” bodies



# “Normal height”?



From Tall:Life

# Enhancement, normalization, and other interventions



# An underdetermined and contestable concept

- Many possible cases are hard to classify: gray areas between categories, perhaps a spectrum
- Potentially arbitrary and changing boundaries of what “better than well” means
- Confusingly linked to other interventions that may have goals other than healing or cure
- Yet remains intuitively plausible and compelling

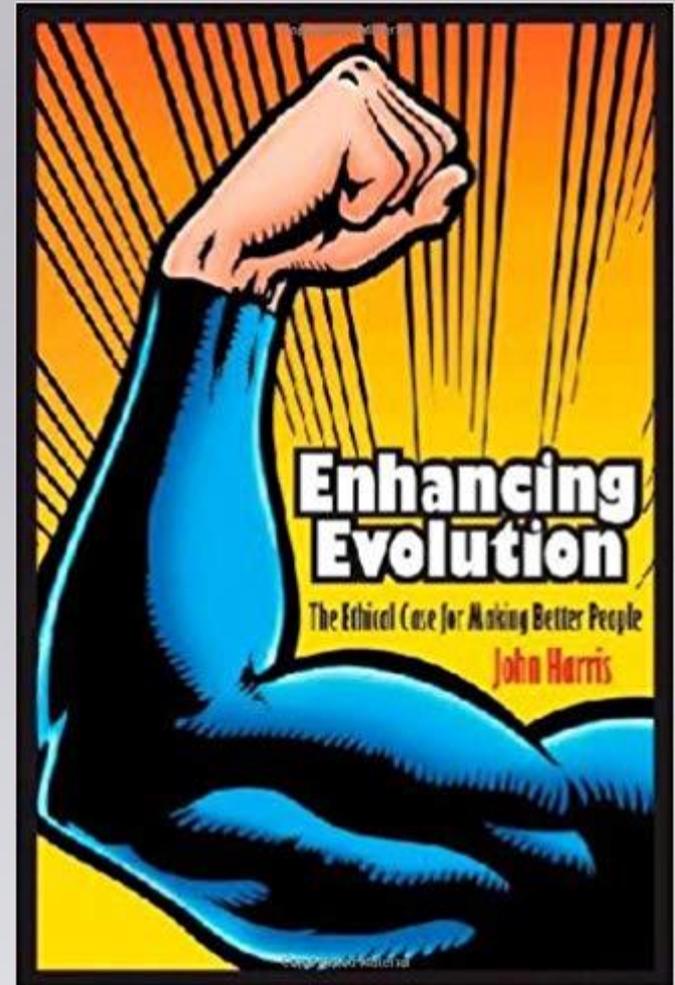
Why do it?

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It's good for us

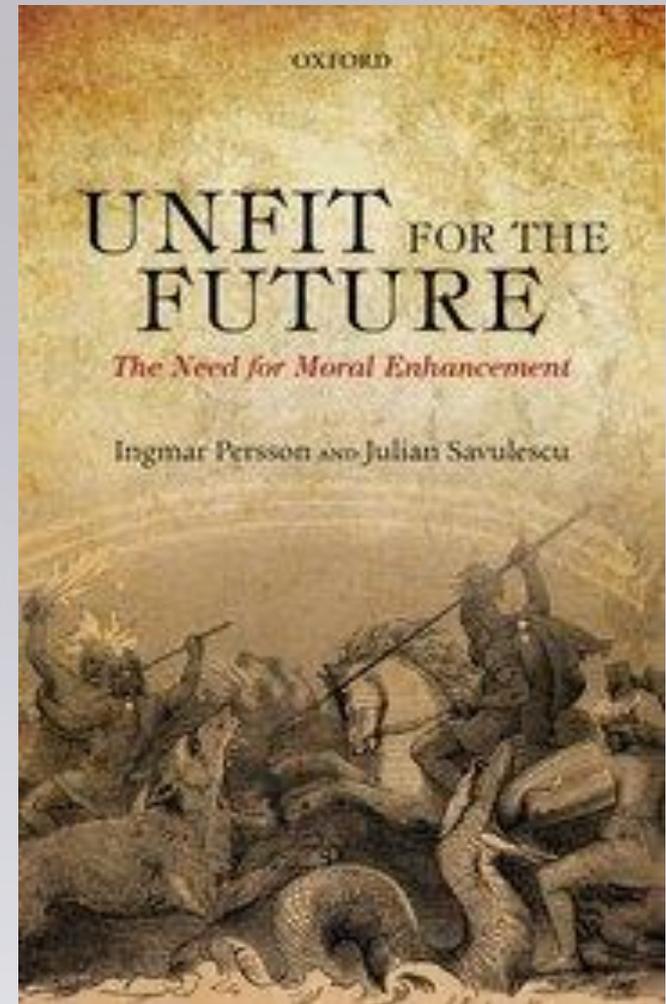
“I propose both the wisdom and the necessity of intervening in what has been called the natural lottery of life, to improve things by taking control of evolution and our future development to the point, and indeed beyond the point, where we humans will have changed, perhaps into a new and certainly into a better species.”

– John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution*



“There are in principle no philosophical or moral objections” to biomedical moral enhancement, and “the current predicament of humankind is so serious that it is imperative” to explore biomedical moral enhancement.

– Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, *Unfit for the Future*

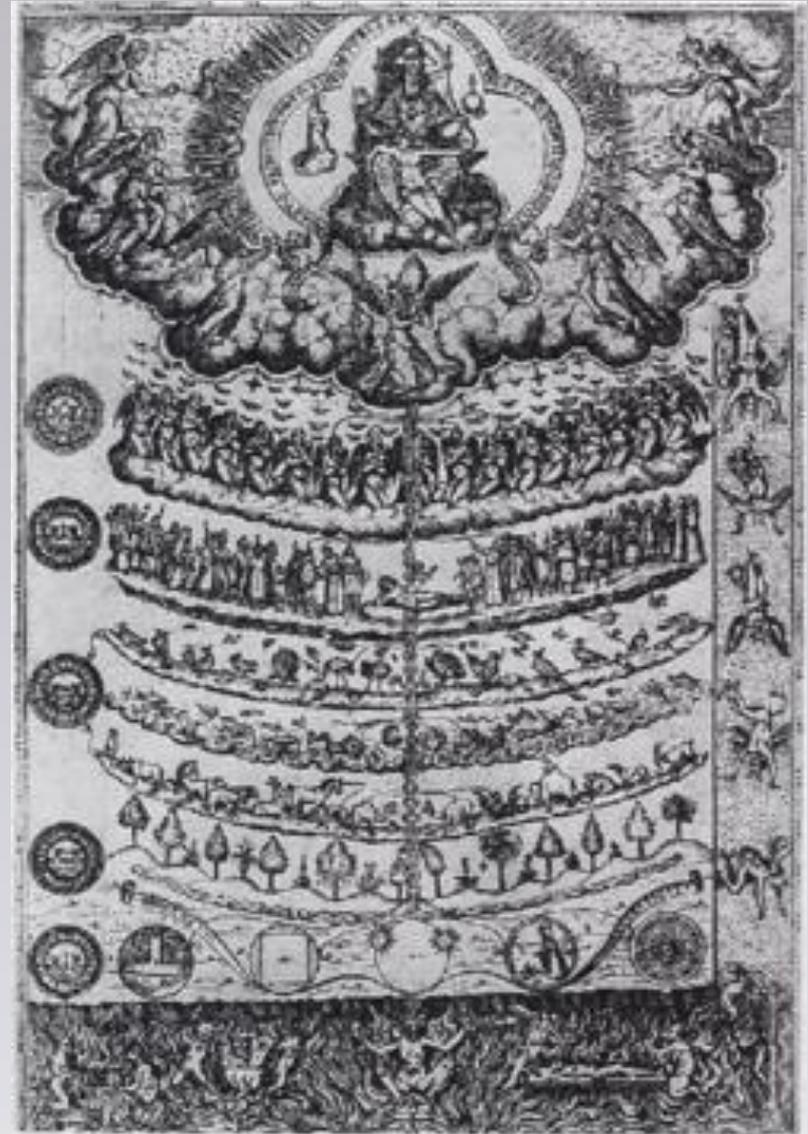


We already do it



Other claims often made in favor

- We inevitably *will* do it
- Opposition to it is based on emotions, fear
- The opposition is based on an implausible view of nature

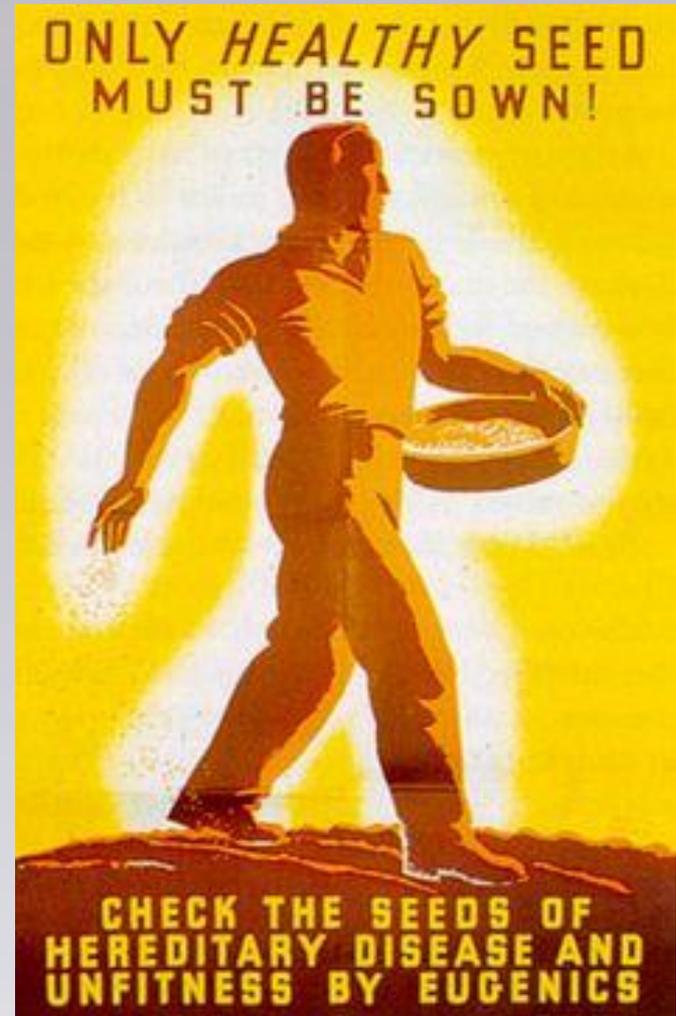


Why would we not do it?

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It's bad for people

- An enhancement competition?
- Commodification? (Habermas)
- Discriminatory attitudes?  
(Nathan Comfort)

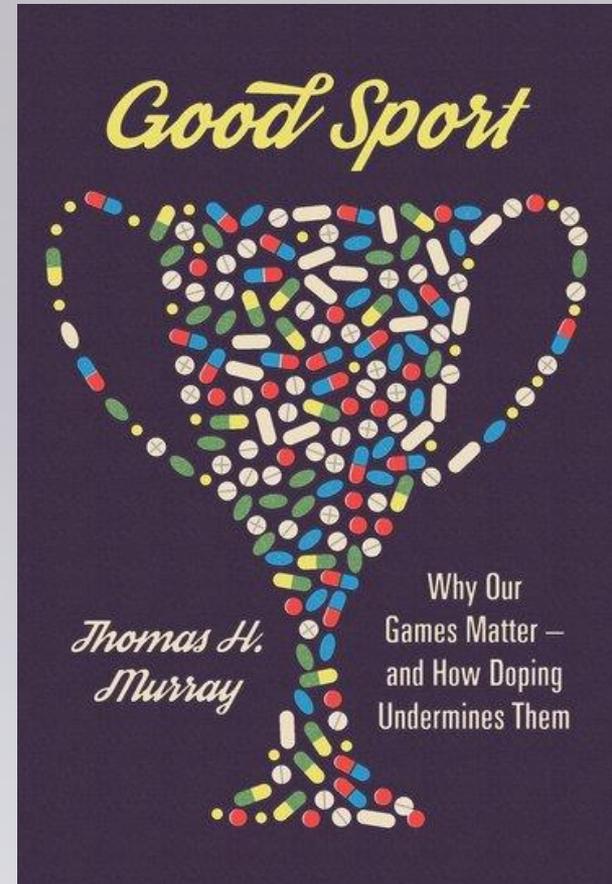


- Loss of agency? (Kass)
- Loss of authenticity? (Parens)
- Loss of finitude? (Kass)



# Might undermine or violate social norms

- Distributive justice?
- Conventions underlying sports, music... (Murray)
- “The kingdom of ends” (Habermas)



Can we value nature?

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# Some of the language of the human relationship to nature

- “It’s not natural!”
- “That’s like playing God!”
- “Yuck!”
  
- Authenticity (Parsons)
- Giftedness (Sandel)



# 1<sup>st</sup> Distinction: the moral significance of nature

Nature as moral instructor vs. nature as moral subject

First approach has an illustrious history, but also some ugliness, and it requires a lot of support

“Man necessarily obeys the laws of nature, or, in other words, the properties of things, but does not necessarily *guide* himself by them.... In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature’s everyday performances.” —J.S. Mill

# 1<sup>st</sup> Distinction: the moral significance of nature

Nature as moral instructor vs. nature as moral subject

Second approach has a more recent history and is a much weaker claims about the moral significance of nature

“Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of Nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation...; every flowering waste or natural pasture ploughed up,... and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated in the name of improved agriculture. —J.S. Mill

2<sup>nd</sup> Dist.: reasons that nature has moral value  
Independent moral truth vs. construct of thought/culture

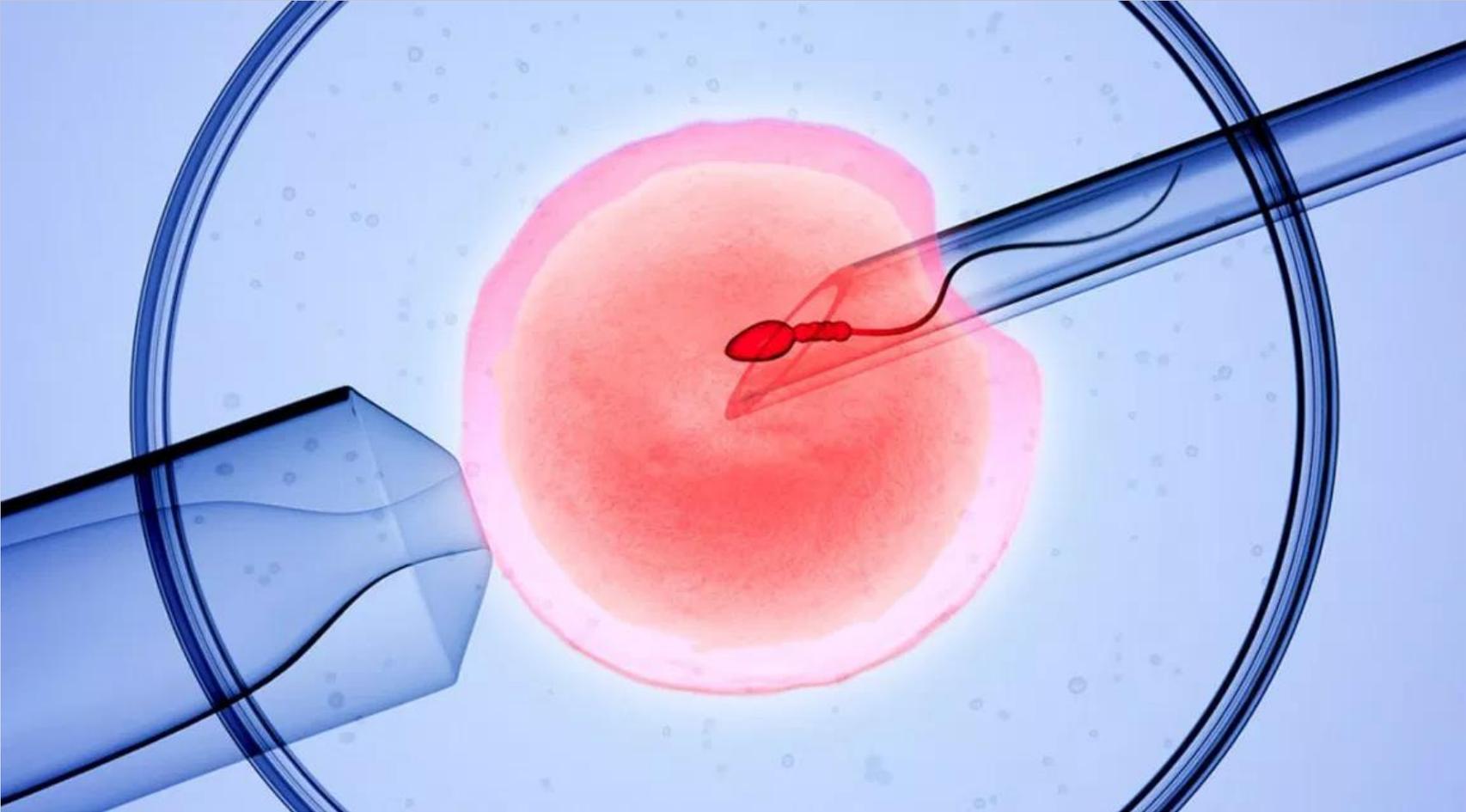
First approach appeals to our desire for moral certainty but requires a ton of good argument

“Biotechnologies directly challenge the most deeply rooted religious and spiritual claims of limits to human knowledge and power over the natural world.... All naturalistic arguments against biotechnology are actually spiritual arguments in disguise... [although sometimes] hidden in layers of self-deception.” —Lee Silver

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Dist.: reasons that nature has moral value Independent moral truth vs. construct of thought/culture

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things ...  
... For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— “The Peace of Wild Things,” Wendell Berry



3<sup>rd</sup> Dist.: what in nature would we protect?  
Specific things with bright moral lines vs.  
patterns and shades of gray



## Sum: the understanding of nature

- Human nature might have moral worth
- “Nature” is not fixed and is not simply defined
- Might be piecemeal
- Can be defeated by other moral goals
- Counterexamples are meaningful but not always decisive
- Normalization is not automatically desirable
- Genome editing is not necessarily undesirable in principle
- Enhancement might sometimes be fine/great
- “It’s against nature!” is unhelpful

What should public policy look like?

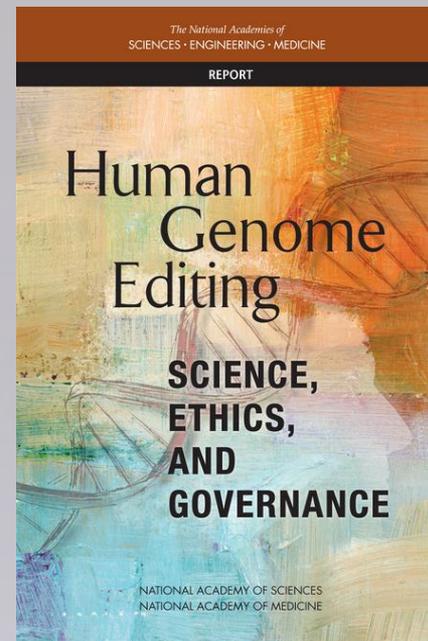
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# The human relationship to nature in public policy



- Wariness about enforcement of perspectives
- Wariness about eliminating perspectives
- Robust informed consent from individuals
- Precaution in the research and its deployment
- Public deliberation to determine public's views

# Nat'l Academies 2017 recommendations



- Recommendation 7-1. “Extensive and inclusive public participation should precede clinical trials for any extension of human genome editing beyond treatment or prevention of disease or disability.”
- Recommendation 7-3. “Public participation should be incorporated into the policy-making process for human genome editing and should include ongoing monitoring of public attitudes, informational deficits, and emerging concerns about issues surrounding ‘enhancement.’”

# Methods of public deliberation

- Existing mechanisms—such as public comment periods and public referenda
- High-level coordinating bodies—such as a “global observatory” or a “governance coordinating committee”
- Methods to promote stronger direct public deliberation