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Human enhancement: the more the better?



Box 14.3 Activity: Personal reflection

Reconsider the precautionary principle (Chapter 6, pp. 79–85). Do you think that the problem of genetic holism should prompt us to lean on that principle in banning the engineering of (i) germ cells, (ii) somatic cells?



Box 14.5 Activity: Group activity

Francis Fukuyama suggests the following thought experiment:

‘Assume that in 20 years we come to understand the genetics of homosexuality well and devise a way for parents to sharply reduce the likelihood that they will give birth to a gay child. This does not have to presuppose the existence of genetic engineering, it could simply be a pill that provided sufficient levels of testosterone in utero to masculinise the brain of the developing foetus. Suppose the treatment is cheap, effective, produces no significant side effects and can be prescribed in the privacy of the obstetrician’s office. Assume further that social norms have become totally accepting of homosexuality. How many expecting mothers would opt to take this pill?’¹¹

How many participants agree with Fukuyama? What are the ramifications for the therapy–enhancement distinction, especially in those countries where discrimination on the grounds of sexuality is illegal?

Note: biotechnology is fast finding ways of enabling gay and lesbian people to have their own biologically related children (see Part II, especially Chapters 9 and 10).



Box 14.8 Activity: Group discussion: pharmaceutical enhancement and character

Taking Prozac has the same effect on our brains as having fun. Therefore there cannot be a moral difference between the two.

The group might be divided according to their own views on this subject or they might be assigned sides to take.



Box 14.9 Activity: Paired discussion

Does virtue ethics suggest that we should *never* take cognitive enhancing drugs because doing so might weaken our character?

Might the Aristotelian 'golden mean' provide an answer (see page 34)?



Box 14.10 Activity: Essay writing: drugs in sport

Participants should research and write a 1500-word essay on one of the following:

1. Athletes who refuse to enhance themselves by legal means deserve to lose.
2. Taking cognitive enhancers before an exam is cheating.
3. There is no difference between using a performance-enhancing drug and using a performance-enhancing swimsuit, and both are acceptable.

The claims could instead be used to stimulate group discussion.



Box 14.11 Activity: Personal reflection

Do you agree parents should be given free rein to enhance their children? If not how would you regulate parental uses of enhancement?

**Box 14.12 Activity: Group debate**

This House believes that the state must regulate enhancement to avoid the natural lottery becoming as unfair as the social lottery.

Participants might be put into groups and directed to take a certain side, or left to choose their own sides.

**Box 14.13 Activity: Creative writing**

Could permitting parents a free rein with enhancement lead to the bifurcation of society?

Write a 500-word essay imagining the effects this could have on society.

**Box 14.14 Activity: Group discussion**

Imagine that we can remove all suffering from the world. Should we do so?

The discussion should be open to the whole group, each of whom can argue as they choose. This website might help: <http://www.bltc.com/>.