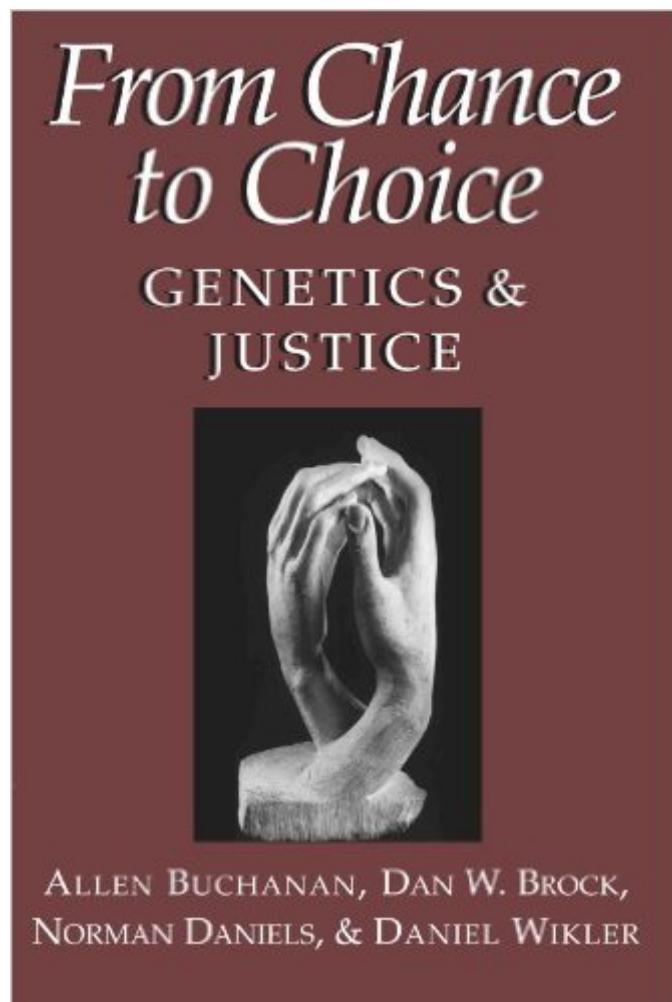


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From Chance To Choice: Genetics And Justice



Synopsis

Written by four internationally renowned bioethicists, *From Chance to Choice* is the first systematic treatment of the fundamental ethical issues underlying the application of genetic technologies to human beings. Probing the implications of the remarkable advances in genetics, the authors ask how should these affect our understanding of distributive justice, equality of opportunity, the rights and obligations as parents, the meaning of disability, and the role of the concept of human nature in ethical theory and practice. The book offers a historical context to contemporary debate over the use of these technologies by examining the eugenics movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, appendices explain the nature of genetic causation, gene-environment interaction, and expose widespread misconceptions of genetic determinism, as well as outlining the nature of the ethical analysis used in the book. The questions raised in this book will be of interest to any reflective reader concerned about science and society and the rapid development of biotechnology, as well as to professionals in such areas as philosophy, bioethics, medical ethics, health management, law, and political science.

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Customer Reviews

I would like to suggest that this book is a landmark in the intellectual history of the human race on a par with Rousseau's Social Contract and Darwin's Origin of the Species. This book is a great achievement for the authors (a "dream team" of practicing bioethicists). I had just enough training in ethics (B.A. Michigan 1982) to understand the book and I enjoyed it immensely. I wonder, however,

whether this book would probably be inaccessible to many readers who should read it. I expect we will need a really thorough set of "Cliff Notes" (or "Genomic Ethics for Dummies"), since this book seems designed to be read by the modern ethical philosopher, moreso than the educated members of the public. Perhaps the reviewers on .com could provide such a service for the world. I was fortunate to have an advance peek at the book through a conference held in San Diego in January, so I have had some time to reflect on the book's implications. This book made me intrigued about the prospect for some people using the genome to have better babies (see the book on Designer Babies by Dr. Gosden for the "how to" on in vitro fertilization). Under secular ethical principles, as outlined in this book, do parents have an ethical obligation to use genomic information to have a "healthier" child? If so, what are the ethical boundaries of that obligation? NPR had a report some time ago about some achondroplastic dwarf parents who wanted to choose a child with their genetic "defect" --- is that sometime ethically prohibited by the principles in this book? The parental choice issues raised by this book strike me as the issue ripe for controversy. These are the fundamental questions that this book raises for every member of the human race who plans to procreate (or already has procreated). My kids will be entering the first generation where prospects for improving admission to the aristocracy (e.g. to an Ivy League school) arguably could begin at the moment of conception (if in vitro, aided by genomic data to screen embryos). I find that interesting and a little bit alarming. Chance to Choice also addresses myriad ethical issues (those relating to "distributive justice" in the mode of John Rawls' Theory of Justice) that will spin off from the genome project. They suggest that genetic discrimination (the "genetic ghetto") may arise if we are not careful about how this information is used. For anyone planning to make a living from the genome, some understanding of this book is essential to their success in business (I am an attorney involved in biotech issues and I think that this book point to (but does not map out) the boundaries of what companies can do with the genome). My EMail is tredick@chapinlaw.com if anyone interested in discussing this book's implications further. I think that people will be talking about this one until the talking, bipedal genetically enhanced, vegetarian activist cows come home sometime in the next hundred years (just kidding... ;). I plan to buy some extra copies on .com to give away or mark up with highlighters (those parts I need to read many times to really understand). It really is a great and timely book. Tom

This book addresses all of the necessary details of the social ramifications involved with our knowledge of the human genome. In this book, the heart wrenching accounts of America's eugenic movement are powerful enough to move anyone to become actively involved in the issues at hand.

A real eye opener, one which makes it painstakingly clear that we are not prepared to deal with the information that we have aquired about ourselves and eachother.

This book is dense and intellectually rigorous. It allows the reader to understand the history of eugenics - how the concept has been shaped and used by many different people and many different agendas over the last two hundred years. My only concern is that it lacks an understanding of the implications of genetic screening and enhancement in the real lived world - that while it may argue there a few ethical and "justice" hurdles in the way of using the knowledge gained from the study of genetics - it does not account for how such changes would impact the lives of real people. It is worth reading however because it demonstrates how easily we have come to accept the ideas put forward by geneticists as to the benefits of genetic screening and illustrates the assumptions many geneticists make about the lives of people disability. That is that many (not all) but many are better off not lived. And that the emphasis should be on prevention rather than cure.

Every person born is a highly probabilistic creature, having been randomly put together by a chance selection from twenty-three chromosomes from each parent. The combinatorial variation is remarkable even in extremely homogeneous populations, and even more so in multicultural populations where there are great disparities in the average abilities of different groups. Blacks excel in sports of speed leading to their total dominance in professional sports. Jews excel in verbal intelligence leading to their remarkable dominance in law, academics, politics, and the media. And other groups fall in between these group-based genetic differences. However, it is evident throughout this book that these issues will not be dealt with honestly and directly. They will be tip-toed around, especially intelligence. This book ignores the more communitarian morality of Asian countries and/or western particularistic moral theories. They do take it up in Appendix II, "Methodology." There they state simply that a communitarian moral theory only exists as a condemnation of liberalism -- it does not attempt to put forth its own communitarian moral theory as rigorously as has been put forth by liberalism or a Rawlsian theory. Notice the irony here, that the same charge can be made against those (Gould, Lewontin, Rose, Kamin, et al.) who claim that there is no difference in the average intelligence of races or that genes do not matter. They also, like the communitarian moralists, have only attacked empiricists who have developed sociobiology and intelligence as genetically based. So now we have the kettle calling the stove black. These authors are concerned that society will become more stratified with regards to genetic capital by various groups. That is, the well-to-do will be able to use genetic engineering to eliminate unwanted genes

as well as enhance their children's potential by inserting new "improved" genes into their genetic code -- including altering the germ line genes that will be carried on to successive generations. Is this a fair criticism? Not really, because this is how evolution progresses and it has already occurred as I stated above. Groups, because of breeding are not the same. Again, using the example of Ashkenazi Jews or east Asians who dominate the economies of south Asian countries, multiculturalist societies are already made up of groups who are not equal. Ashkenazi Jews have an average IQ of 117 and live among populations with an average IQ of 100. Malaysians have an average IQ of 90 with a troublesome east Asian minority, that will not assimilate, and has an average IQ of about 106 that dominates the economy. Australians have a troublesome minority of aborigines with a low IQ. These and many other examples show that there is nothing new about some groups eugenically rising above other groups, in terms of intelligence at least. But now that we have new tools at our disposal, those of us who would like to acquire the high intelligence of Ashkenazi Jews for example are told that it is somehow unjust!

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