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To the Editor
New York Times

I must respond to an attribution by Lee Edson (Oct. 31 -Sect. 4) that I first suggested the modification of the human genetic constitution, about ten years ago.

I have indeed been discussing the implications of the uses of new knowledge of molecular biology throughout that period. I certainly was not the first to bring up these possibilities. More important, my discussions have always centered on the social and ethical dilemmas that are associated with such techniques, as well as on the technical problems of actually realizing some of the prophecies that have been widely publicized. No one who has read my writings would believe that I advocate the "remaking of man" by the use of genetic technology, nor do I share the naive anxieties about this type of intrusion on the freedom of the individual that, unfortunately, make the most attractive news copy. There is no doubt that genetic therapy ~~does~~ afford an opportunity for the relief of some hereditary defects that now occasion an inordinate toll of human misery. We cannot do much better today than to counsel parents who may be carrying genes for such defects not to have children, or for some diseases to allow the diagnosis of affected fetuses in time to allow an abortion where this is legally and ethically permitted.

It will seriously hinder the thoughtful analysis of these complex problems if efforts to ventilate an issue are confused with advocacy for a particular policy.

Yours sincerely,

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