

Human flourishing in an age of gene editing

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International uproar followed the recent birth of the first babies created from embryos whose genomes had been edited with a breakthrough technology. Another scientist has announced the intention to create more gene-edited babies. The potential uses of gene-editing technologies such as Crispr-Cas9 are unprecedented in human history: they can make genetic alterations that would be passed down to future generations.

The prospect of using gene editing to change ourselves, our children, and their offspring raises a host of difficult questions. Even if gene editing turns out to be safe, what other kinds of risks or harms could it pose? [Human Flourishing in an Age of Gene Editing](#), published by Oxford University Press, leads the way to discussions surrounding deeply held personal, cultural, and societal values regarding human well-being in the context of a revolutionary new biotechnology.

Editors of the book are Erik Parens, a senior research scholar at The Hastings Center, and Josephine Johnston, director of research and a research scholar. The book is one outcome of a three-year international project, supported by the John Templeton Foundation, that focused on the potential social and [ethical implications](#) of using gene editing on human germline cells (eggs, sperm, and embryos), creating changes that could be inherited.

Parens and Johnston commissioned leading thinkers in philosophy, bioethics, religious studies, sociology, [political science](#), law, and psychology to consider what gene editing might mean for human nature and human well-being. The questions explored include:

- What does it mean to flourish, and how might gene editing help or thwart flourishing?
- Could gene editing redefine what it means to be healthy, normal, or loved?
- How might it change relationships between parents and children?
- Could gene editing exacerbate the gap between the haves and the have-nots—and how can we avoid this risk?

The aim for the collection, Parens and Johnston state their introduction, is to stimulate a public conversation about ethical questions raised by gene editing. "It is through this public conversation that citizens can influence laws and the distribution of funding for science and medicine; that professional leaders can shape understanding and use of gene editing and related technologies by scientists, patients, and practitioners; and that individuals can make decisions about their own lives and the lives of their families," they write.

Provided by The Hastings Center

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