

Should human genetic modification always be considered taboo?

Want to see what a genetically modified human looks like? Just glance in the mirror. You are the result of an experiment that randomly modified your DNA in at least 50 places.

No ethics committee in the world would approve such a dangerous practice. But hey, it's OK because the scientist in this case is nature. And nature is good, right? Never mind that some unlucky kids die horrible deaths because they end up with cruel and fatal mutations. Never mind that just about every one of us will suffer at some point in our lives because of the legacy of countless generations of this uncontrolled experiment.

What if we could put a stop to this? We have already begun in a small way. For the past three decades some communities have been screening would-be parents to ensure their children do not inherit one particularly cruel genetic modification – Tay-Sachs disease. More recently, we have begun to screen IVF embryos before they are implanted in cases when we know children risk inheriting one or other of the nastiest results of nature's meddling, such as cystic fibrosis.

And now, with the UK parliament's vote in favour of three-parent babies, we are about to go a step further and actively replace damaged genes with working versions. These will be passed on to subsequent generations, breaking the chain of a range of inherited diseases. Great! This form of genetic engineering should end much suffering. But wait! Gasp! Did I write the e-word? I'm sorry, what I meant was "mitochondrial donation."

The decision to allow three-parent babies is right. But the fact is, opponents were also right to describe this as a step towards tinkering with the rest of our genome. Most supporters seemed to have convinced themselves otherwise, but let's look at the arguments used.

Read full, original article: [Crossing the germ line – facing genetics' great taboo](#)