Why gene editing does not lead to eugenics

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

This summer brings the 50th anniversary of the full deciphering of the genetic code — the four-billion-year-old cipher by which DNA's information is translated and expressed — and the centenary of the birth of Francis Crick, who both co-discovered the existence of that code and dominated the subsequent 13-year quest to understand it. Europe's largest biomedical laboratory, named after him, opens this summer opposite St Pancras station.

Since Crick first showed a chart of the genetic code, on May 5, 1966 at the Royal Society in London, speculation began about the dangers of using this knowledge for the eugenic enhancement of human beings or for making biological weapons. The discovery of a precise gene-editing tool (known as CRISPR-Cas9) has revived that debate yet again, not least with the first application, by Kathy Niakan of the Crick institute, to use CRISPR experimentally on very early human embryos.

Yet in truth the threat of eugenics is fainter than ever, for three reasons. First, the essence of eugenics was compulsion: it was the state deciding who should be allowed to breed, or to survive, for the supposed good of the race. As long as we prevent coercion, we will not have eugenics. Our politics would have to change far more drastically than our science.

Read full, original post: Why eugenics won't come back