

Does a future with genetic enhancements undermine ‘the idea that we are all equal’?

Sex is how humans propagate. But developments in genetic engineering might change this one day. “We are, in the future, going to have sex for most of the wonderful reasons that we have sex now: for fun, for pair-bonding, to connect with other people, to give meaning to our lives. But increasingly we are going to do it less and less for procreation,” says Jamie Metzl, the author of a new book on genetics, “Hacking Darwin.”

Mr Metzl was speaking on The Economist’s Babbage podcast on technology and science. Today, during in vitro fertilisation, it is possible to screen embryos for genetic disorders. Tomorrow it may be feasible to look for—or even add—new traits.

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As more traits are detectable through genetic testing, parents may be able to choose among traits in their natural embryos. But some would go further, and tinker with DNA to produce certain traits.

Gulzaar Barn, a philosopher at King’s College, London, is uneasy with this. On the podcast, she argued that society should be cautious before accepting genetic enhancement as a good thing, since it undermines the idea that we are all equal despite our genetic or individual differences.

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