

# Genes and the Just Society

## Preface

ARTI K. RAI\*

For philosophers influenced by egalitarian ideals, the principle that a just society should act to mitigate inequality has long been a bedrock assumption. Even egalitarian theories of justice have, however, generally drawn a distinction between two types of inequality, social and natural. Many egalitarian theorists have argued that the central type of inequality with which society needs to be concerned is *social* inequality. In other words, if person *A* is born poor and person *B* rich, then society should strive to redistribute resources from *B* to *A*. Although redistribution does not require equalization of wealth, sufficient redistribution should occur to ensure that all persons have equal opportunity. In contrast, egalitarian theorists have often seen *natural* inequalities as relatively fixed and hence of more peripheral concern to justice. Thus, if person *A* is born with great mathematical talent and person *B* with no such talent, justice cannot require that some of *B*'s mathematical talent be redistributed to *A*. Indeed, it may not even require that *B* be compensated by *A* for his lack of natural talent.

In the future, however, the availability of genetic interventions that enhance natural abilities may blur the distinction between the social and the natural. This blurring of distinctions is the central issue with which the authors of *From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice* are concerned.<sup>1</sup> The authors of this book are four distinguished philosophers who have achieved particular renown in the field of bioethics. The

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\* Assistant Professor, University of Pennsylvania Law School.

1. ALLEN BUCHANAN, DAN W. BROCK, NORMAN DANIELS & DANIEL WIKLER, *FROM CHANCE TO CHOICE: GENETICS AND JUSTICE* (2000).

authors address what moral obligations we as a society, and as individuals within that society, might have in the face of interventions that give us “choice” over what was previously “chance.” The authors’ analysis covers a variety of vexing problems, including the following: what genetic interventions must, as a matter of distributive justice, be made available to all; what types of reproductive decisionmaking may be permissible or even required; and what the availability of genetic interventions will do with respect to our attitudes towards the disabled.