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Altered Inheritance

CRISPR and the Ethics of Human Genome Editing

Françoise Baylis

Designer babies, once found only in science fiction, have become a reality. We are entering a new era of human evolution with the advent of a technology called CRISPR, that allows scientists to modify our genes. Although CRISPR shows great promise for therapeutic use, it raises thorny ethical, legal, political, and societal concerns because it can be used to make permanent changes to future generations. What if changes intended for the good turn out to have unforeseen negative effects? What if the divide between the haves and have-nots widens as a result? Who decides whether we genetically modify human beings and, if so, how?

Françoise Baylis insists that we must all have a role in determining our future as a species. The scientists who develop and use genome-editing tools should not be the only ones making decisions about future uses of the technology. Such decisions must be the fruit of a broad societal consensus. Baylis argues that it is in our collective interest to assess and steer the development and implementation of biomedical technologies. Members of the public with different interests and diverse perspectives must be among the decision makers; only in this way can we ensure that societal concerns are taken into account and that responsible decisions are made. We must be informed and engaged, think critically, and raise our voices as we create our future together.

Sharp, rousing, timely, and thought-provoking, *Altered Inheritance* is essential reading. The future of humanity is in our hands.

Françoise Baylis is University Research Professor at Dalhousie University. She is a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Nova Scotia, as well as a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. Baylis was one of the organizers of, and a key participant in, the 2015 International Summit on Human Gene Editing. She is a member of the WHO expert advisory committee on Developing Global Standards for Governance and Oversight of Human Genome Editing