

## **GENE TECHNOLOGY AND ETHICS**

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In the last decade, gene technology has moved into the centre of public debates, whereby the spectrum of opinions range from its advocacy without any reservations to its radical dismissal. Whereas critics first of all primarily put safety policies into the field of vision, in the meantime, the actual ethical discussion has been concentrated on the ratio between what man is able to do and what man is allowed to do.

In order to be able to argue here at all, in an ethical sense, the possibility of a rational discussion concerning good and bad that is not merely the expression of particular morals must be recognized as being a basis. Having obtained this principle agreement, the different fields of gene technology intervention possibilities may be assessed in the sense of considering commodities.

For the non-human field, despite hefty counter arguments from the safety sector, alternative research and prevention of cruelty to animals, the fact that gene technology can, or respectively, does appear to be both ethical as well as desired, emerges. Even in the face of a possible present dismissal of experiments or productions, the considering of commodities could change with modified parameters.

In the human sector, the appraisal is more difficult. In the case of gene analysis which could permit human beings to plan their lives better, besides voluntariness, protection of data privacy and confidentiality, the further framework within which it is to be performed must be considered: The possibility of discrimination and ostracizing and even the selection "of life unworthy to live", especially in the pre-natal stage of human life, must be out of the question.

Gene therapy on body cells (somatic gene therapy) is almost exclusively still at the experimental stage and, ethically, can be appraised like organ transplantations — with all the prejudices and dubiousness.

Gene therapy in the embryo tract, that is, gene technology intervention on fertilized egg cells has to be ethically strictly rejected. Here, it is not a human being who is being cured but more their identity that is being manipulated. Embryo tract gene therapy does not lead to a "more beautiful world", but to the constantly increasing and irreversible power of present-day human beings over coming generations and i.e. in this respect, to a dominance of the dead over the living.

Finally, two arguments which are as popular and global as they are wrong and which occur in gene technology debates have to be dismissed and that is "nature does it too" and "no biologist wants to do anything immoral".