

Summary abstract for "Ethical considerations on crossing the germline"

For decades leading scientists had one moral rule when it came to genetic engineering—no modifying the germline. Now comes CRISPR and other tools that permit the accurate alteration of genes. Does the prohibition on germline engineering still hold? No. It never made ethical sense and it will not be honored in the years to come.

The main reason for the old rule was to not permit opening the door to eugenics—designing kids who are smarter, stronger, taller and hardier than we are. But this argument will fail. The power of parents seeking to prevent harm to their kids through the repair of inherited diseases will overwhelm concerns about a world of super-people. No one will ever succeed in stopping hereditary genetic engineering out of concern for possible abuse and misuse for the purpose of enhancement in the face of real human suffering in the here and now. The sick cannot ethically be held hostage to worries about possible future dangers. Those need to be handled on their own terms. The old rule against genetically altering heritable traits is history.