

Dr. Oliver Feeney

'JUST' PERCEPTIONS? PLACEBO-GENOMIC ENHANCEMENT AS A PROBLEM FOR JUSTICE

It is a well-recognised fear that human enhancement technology could exacerbate inequalities, whether from robotics, pharmaceuticals or developments in genomics (Sienna 2021). The potential of human genome editing being used for enhancement purposes – somatic or germline – has arisen in the WHO report (2021). In my paper, I wish to confine myself to talking about one subset of potential, complex human enhancements by use of genome editing (such as intelligence). In some such cases, I contend that we may always be dealing more with beliefs in enhancement rather than the notion of enhancement itself. Furthermore, I argue that - in such cases - even if there was no enhancement in fact, the effects of a false belief in the enhancement could have enhancing effects. Hence, a potential phenomenon of what I call 'Placebo enhancements' may arise – not genuine in actual change in targeted function, but genuine in overall enhancing effects. And those real effects (even if based on this initial placebo effect) can pose novel and difficult challenges for ethical and social justice considerations.

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