

September 1994

Review of: *The Genetic Frontier: Ethics, Law, and Policy* (Mark S. Frankel & Albert Teich eds., American Association for the Advancement of Science 1994)

Suzanne A. Sprunger

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/risk>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Genetics and Genomics Commons](#), [Genetic Structures Commons](#), [Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility Commons](#), and the [Medical Genetics Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Suzanne A. Sprunger, *Review of: The Genetic Frontier: Ethics, Law, and Policy* (Mark S. Frankel & Albert Teich eds., American Association for the Advancement of Science 1994), 5 RISK 353 (1994).

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Hampshire – School of Law at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in RISK: Health, Safety & Environment (1990-2002) by an authorized editor of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact ellen.phillips@law.unh.edu.

The Genetic Frontier: Ethics, Law, and Policy (Mark S. Frankel & Albert Teich eds., American Association for the Advancement of Science 1994). Acknowledgments, appendix, contributors, figures, index, introduction, notes, references, tables. LC 93-37230, ISBN 0-87168-526-4. [260 pp. Paper \$22.95. 1333 H St., NW, Washington DC 20005.]

Geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky once posited a conflict between potential harm to human genetic vitality and an imperative to help those with genetic disorders:¹

If we enable the weak and the deformed to live and to propagate their kind, we face the prospect of a genetic twilight. But if we let them die or suffer when we can save or help them, we face the certainty of a moral twilight.

Since we can now detect "flawed" genes and soon will be able to treat their effects or even eliminate them, the risk seems no longer the perpetuation of faulty genes but going too far with genetic information and intervention. The Human Genome Project² and other research is reshaping the most personal aspects of our lives, e.g., courtship, marriage, reproductive choices, medical diagnosis and treatment, and control of private information. As the number and impact of genetic options increase, novel ethical issues proliferate. The twilight we fear is the unprincipled use of new technologies, the shades of eugenics and of discrimination based on immutable characteristics.

The Genetic Frontier is a useful resource for those interested in legal and ethical issues raised by genetic research. It is a collection of articles by highly respected authors based on presentations at a June 1992 conference organized by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)-American Bar Association, National Conference of Lawyers and Scientists and the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility.³ Although much of the guidance for this meeting came from the AAAS Project on Ethical and Legal Implications of

¹ Quoted in Melvin M. Green, *Human Genetics Notes* 1 (1975).

² See e.g., 5 *Risk* 95-175 (1994) (papers from a 1993 conference on intellectual property and technology transfer issues raised by the Human Genome Project).

³ Acknowledgments, at *xi*.

Genetic Testing,⁴ its scope extended beyond genetic testing to encompass other current and complex issues. Thus the book has four sections: the effects of genetic research and testing on the family and social policy; privacy and confidentiality issues; the relationship between genes, behavior and responsibility; and intellectual property rights. Most articles include extensive references; those who read particular articles will probably find useful sources in related contributions.

A book with objectives of "rais[ing] intriguing ethical and legal questions, as well as important policy issues"⁵ is apt to be longer on questions than answers. Still, it presents helpful suggestions and frames of reference for use in the search for answers. The authors generally express the hope that as scientists and policy makers cope with the effects of genetic research, they will use "an ethical imagination,"⁶ "refer[ring] to what it is to be human, to live in responsible relations to others, to posterity, and to the natural and cosmic sources of life."⁷

Participants in the conference leading to *The Genetic Frontier* were deeply involved with many aspects of the effects of genetic research and testing: doctors, biomedical researchers, sociologists, theological ethicists and government officials.⁸ This diversity produces a fairly balanced treatment of each topic. Yet, given a select and sophisticated original audience, the authors assume that readers have at least a general knowledge of genetics. Terms of art such as "genetic load" and "ultimacy" are used without definition. This is a barrier to readers who would have benefitted from a brief glossary.

Suzanne A. Sprunger[†]

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Introduction at *xv*.

⁶ At 21.

⁷ At 19.

⁸ Appendix at 225.

[†] Dr. Sprunger received her B.S. (Biology) from Cornell University and, after several years of research in molecular biology and genetics, she received a Ph.D. (Genetics) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a candidate for the J.D. and M.I.P. at FPLC.