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[Book Review of] *What Are They Saying About Genetic Engineering?*, by Thomas A. Shannon

Gary M. Atkinson

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I have focused on two points: (1) the theological thesis that the divine purposes do not coincide with human well-being, and (2) the structures of moral relevance according to which moral significance is to be determined by references to the multiple "wholes" of which we are a part. I have suggested that these give rise to certain tensions. Nevertheless, the volumes remain a profound contribution to theological and ethical reflection. Any subsequent work, to be taken seriously, will have to meet the exacting standards which they have set.

—Brian V. Johnstone, C.S.S.R.
The Catholic University of America

What Are They Saying About Genetic Engineering?

by Thomas A. Shannon

New York, Paulist Press, 1985, vi+ 103 pages, \$4.95.

This is quite a good little introduction to some of the ethical issues associated with the field of genetics. In a remarkably brief space of less than 100 pages, the author covers a variety of fields of contemporary investigation and highlights their ethical components. He begins with three chapters that deal with the relationships between science (and scientists) and society, the control of potentially harmful knowledge, and the nature of human personhood and responsibilities to the future. Then the author moves to a discussion of the attempt to understand human nature through genetics (sociobiology); the use of recombinant DNA technology; techniques for assisting human conception and birth (sperm banks, amniocentesis, in vitro fertilization, embryo transfer, sex selection, surrogate motherhood, the fetus as an independent patient of medical treatment); gene transfer as therapy for genetic disease; induced modifications of plant and animal species; and economic issues pertaining to the funding of and access to the new therapies and technologies. The author constructs his discussion by citing prominent authorities in the field: Paul Ramsey, Daniel Callahan, Leon Kass, Karl Rahner, Richard McCormick, Joseph Fletcher, Jeremy Rifkin, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This book does not attempt to break new ground, and would be of little use to someone already familiar with the field. But for the reader who is interested in gaining an overview of the ethical dimensions of current genetic theory and technology, the work will serve the purpose admirably. The author's general position is middle-of-the-road, cautious. He is more concerned to achieve a balanced position by noting the strengths of the various views than to criticize any of them in a systematic fashion. Although the scholar would be unlikely to profit from a reading of this work, it could be very helpful as a text for an introductory course in bioethics.

—Gary M. Atkinson
St. Thomas College