



1

SYNOPSIS: In a future time when people are born genetically engineered, Vincent is the product of natural reproduction and is genetically predicted to die at age 30. Vincent defies his fate and under false identity enters Gattaca, an astronaut training program for a manned mission to a moon of Saturn. Vincent borrows the genetic identity of a paralyzed athlete named Jerome, in the form of blood samples, hair clippings, and skin scrapings. When one of Gattaca's supervisors is murdered, investigators are brought in and they soon discover the presence of Vincent's real DNA. He thus becomes a suspect and attempts to dodge efforts that link his real DNA to his new identity. The real murder is eventually caught, and Vincent successfully makes the Saturn voyage. "Gattaca" deals with two distinct **PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES:** The morality of creating genetically engineered humans, and the ability to act contrary to our biological predispositions. Both of these points are encapsulated in an advertising line for the movie: "There's no gene for the human spirit."

2

Role of chance

- Vincent (aka Jerome) was a love child (or God child) and his parents were shocked to find out about all the psychological and physical problems he would have. He was supposed to die at 30 and have severe ADHD.
- When Jerome's parents went to a genetics center when they were considering a second child, they were told about all the automatic improvements that would be made (baldness, myopia, alcoholism, addictive tendencies, obesity, violent tendencies).
- The father asked if some things should be left to chance.
- What would be the morality of leaving things to chance?

3

Morality of genetic improvements

- In an outtake to the movie, the geneticist states that for an extra \$5,000 he could give the embryo enhanced musical or mathematical skills – essentially splicing in a gene that was not present on the parents' original DNA.
- Would this differ from making the child stronger or healthier or better looking or psychologically more stable by using only genes that were present in the parents' DNA?

4

Benefits vs liabilities

- In the movie it is stated that it is illegal to discriminate – genoism it's called – but no one takes the law seriously.
- This is one of the standard criticisms of genetic profiling.
- Employers, insurers, police, etc. will use that data against the individual.
- Would the benefits of genetic profiling still outweigh the liabilities?

5

Exceeding expectations

- The following dialogue regarding the rigorous testing that occurred in the movie:
 - Director Josef: “we have to ensure that people are meeting their potential.”
 - Investigator: “Not exceeding it?”
 - Director Josef: “No one exceeds his potential.”
 - Investigator: “If he did?”
 - Director Josef: “It means we did not accurately gage his potential in the first place.”
- This dialog exhibits that determinism is unfalsifiable. Is this viable?

6

Rising Above

- The moral message of the movie is that we can rise above our genetic predispositions – especially our pre-determined physical abilities. It also applies to our pre-determined behavioral traits. Two prime examples are Vincent living past 30, and Director Josef committing a murder.
- Can you think of others?
- What is the Christian perspective on “rising above?”