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Platform

As medical progress speeds up, we need to ask tough questions about the sort of society we are creating, says **Natalia Peltari**

WHAT kind of society would exist if persons with disabilities were "released" (given death by lethal injection) and suffering no longer existed? Would it be a positive utopian or negative dystopian future? What are the ethical consequences of such a eugenic society, where only the best are selected for existence?

As medicine and biotechnology quickly progress, advances in research are making possible things that were unimagined only a century ago. In the past few years, we have made major headway in the battle against HIV and cancer; progress in transplant technology and prosthetic limbs are giving new hope to many; and human embryonic gene editing promises the eradication of disease, disability and suffering. A bright utopian future seems



more attainable than ever before.

Though advances in treatment of illnesses and chronic conditions are undoubtedly good, what is the cost of the relentless search for the elimination of all suffering and disability in society?

The film *The Giver* (2014), based on the bestselling novel by the American writer, Lois Lowry, shows us a dire picture of the cost: a colourless, egalitarian society, where all citizens self-medicate to remain happy and follow the rules set by the Elders. Pain and suffering are eliminated by genetic modification and by euthanising the disabled, sick, depressed, and elderly.

In this society, a chosen few possess the memories of the history that shaped the human experience. Jonas (Brenton Thwaites), a young adult, is selected to be the Receiver of the Memories. In order to pass on the collective wisdom of humanity, *The Giver* (Jeff Bridges) shows him emotions, good and evil, which drives Jonas to question his life, society, and the motives of the Elders led by Chief Elder (Meryl Streep). He does not want to remain a happy robot but have a more meaningful life.

A screening of *The Giver* will take place on Wednesday, 15 June, 8.30pm, at the Edinburgh Filmhouse, as part of the fringe event of the 13th World Congress of the International Association of Bioethics and the annual Edinburgh International Biomedical Ethics Film Festival. It will be followed by a discussion between the audience and a panel of invited experts in bioethics, science, law, medicine and politics.

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