

Genetic link to IQ will lead scientists into very tricky moral dilemmas

ANALYSIS

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RESEARCH demonstrating that more than 500 genes are linked to intellectual ability is certain to raise significant ethical concerns.

The science journalist Jerome Burne ever indicated, in 1998, that "anything to do with

intelligence is deep water, combine it with genetics and it becomes positively shark-infested".

The extreme sensitivity in this field is best represented by the manner in which the media and subsequent public discussions have dismissed, in the past, claims suggesting that variations in people's Intelligence Quotient (IQ) are based on their genes.

This happened, in part, because of a fear of a return to a new eugenics which would

promote selection strategies based on the genetic quality of children.

For example, concerns exist that as soon as genes for intelligence are determined, people will begin asking for genetic tests so that they may select their children to give them the best possible chance of eventually going to a top university.

Continuing comments making reference to a person's lack of intellectual facilities as "mild mental impairment" has

also been seen as being dangerous.

Some senior scientists, for example, have already spoken approvingly of low IQ levels as "mild mental handicap" which could easily be compared with labels such as "moderate learning difficulties" or "moderate sub-normality" used in past education legislation.

But the sensitivity of the debates relating to the association of genetics and intelligence may reflect an even deeper challenge.

This is because it could enable each and every human being to question their own worth and value in society.

In this respect, it has already been suggested that the more intelligent a person is seen to be, the more of a "human person" he or she becomes!

Thus, a real fear exists in many human beings that they may not be as intellectually capable as others and may, therefore, be considered as less valuable to society or even less

of a person than others. This means that a real and open ethical discussion in society has become necessary to follow future trends in the relationship between genetics and intelligence.

At the same time, the possible consequences of such results will need to be carefully scrutinised to determine possible risks of discrimination.

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