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Gene Research Explosive Crisis

MANKIND faces a crisis that could prove to be as explosive as discovery of the atomic bomb. This is the possibility that scientists are close to discovering how to control types of people to be born.

This is a predicted result of what is called "recombinant DNA research." It deals with ways to alter or regulate genes, elements which tell human cells how to make essential products that determine our form of life and individual characteristics.

Such control has been an object of speculation by scientists, writers and politicians for centuries. Viewed as an approaching reality, the potentialities are awesome.

Controversies have arisen over whether such research should be continued and Congress is considering enactment of a law to turn regulation over to a federal agency. Because of what might be implied in regimentation of gene control, such a law might present a hazard on a par with presently unknown diseases that might be created and escape into the world.

Carl Jay Bajema, Harvard scien-

tist, said in 1971: "To produce future generations bright and creative enough to cope with increasingly more complex environment, the government will have to decide what types of people will be allowed to be born."

In an informative article on gene research published in its September 1976 issue, National Geographic magazine stated:

"Some scientists now prophesy that, in the future, gene manipulation may be used to cure ancient genetic diseases, and perhaps even cancer; to prolong life; to create new types of agricultural plants and animals, and some day possibly to make significant changes in man himself."

Scientists have long talked about discovery of means for mass reproduction of identical human beings, called "cloning." This is not now technically possible, but some say it could become a reality within 20 to 50 years.

Such a thought might be repulsive to those who regard creation of man and reproduction of mankind as the handiwork of God, a system

of life with which man should not meddle.

Others may be equally alarmed by the idea of federal bureaucrats making family life decisions for the nation. Joseph A. Califano Jr., secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, told a Senate committee this month that "there is no reasonable alternative to regulation under law," referring to research.

Dr. William O. Baker, vice chairman of the President's Committee on Science and Technology, said in a speech that group would provide a new opportunity for the national community of science and engineering to be involved in federal planning.

By far, the big end of scientific research depends upon federal funding and scientists are involved in politics to the extent needed to obtain appropriations. They do not live in a world apart.

Are people becoming too smart for their own good? The dilemma of freedom of research or regulated research with all of its implications might point in that direction.