# *Smarter Babies*

OLE MARTIN MOEN

In "Bright New World"[1] I make a prima facie case for seeking to increase global intelligence by giving prospective mothers modest economic incentives to get pregnant, through insemination, with sperm from donors in the top 5 percent of the IQ range. In a commentary, titled "Increasing the Sum Total of General Intelligence, As Measured by Individual IQ Scores: What, How, and Why?," Professor Matti Häyry launches a number of criticisms.[2]

Häyry starts out by emphasizing the importance of charitable interpretations yet misses his own mark. He does so first by asking how IQ, which is a psychological test device, could itself be worth promoting. Of course it is not the test device that is worth promoting, but that which the test device seeks to measure: intelligence (Häyry later makes it clear that he does indeed understand this). Häyry further asks if what I want to achieve is simply more IQ points *in total*, such that creating billions of people with an IQ of 50 would be good on my account, because a world with billions of people with a low IQ would indeed contain a lot of IQ points. This interpretation, although bizarre, might (charitably) be taken to stem from a misunderstanding of my view on the value of intelligence. Contrary to what Häyry takes for granted, I do not suggest that intelligence is *intrinsically* valuable. In all my justifications for the value of intelligence I point to the *effects* of intelligence on health, prosperity, and other measures, so I am happy to concede that if intelligence is promoted in ways that fail to give rise to further effects that are valuable, it would indeed be worthless. Counterfactually, however, Häyry is right that someone who did hold that IQ is intrinsically valuable would have to face this curious variant of the repugnant conclusion.

Most of Häyry's objections are of a general nature and say very little about my proposal in particular. One example is Häyry's question about what it takes for something to count as improving the human condition. This is an axiological question that I do not know how to answer. If we cannot do applied ethics without first having our ethical ultimates in place, however, we will never get anywhere in applied ethics—not just in discussions about promoting intelligence but also in discussions about promoting causes like peace, literacy, and health. In my article, I assume that things such as health and prosperity are genuine goods (whether intrinsically or instrumentally). Häyry is right to point out that these are value judgments, but he does nothing to undermine them.

Generality is also a problem with many of his further criticisms. Häyry asks if my suggestion might "add more pressure to potential parents," "reduce solidarity" with people who do not use this technology, make "reproduction (even more) dependable on medical technology," and give some an "unearned advantage."[3] Though these are interesting points, they are arguments not against promoting intelligence but against *any* medical technology that could improve people's lives. One might speculate about any medical technology that it might add pressure, reduce solidarity, make us dependent, and make

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some of us comparatively better off in unjust ways. Unless Häyry wants to oppose medical technologies in general, his allegations must be more specific, and he must substantiate his claims. The same goes for Häyry's claim that promoting intelligence through selective reproduction might cause "emotional disturbance, social awkwardness, moral decay, political turmoil, or legal chaos."[4] Why, exactly, does he think that?

A similar problem is present in Häyry's claim that the "added income of individuals with higher IQ scores can reduce the income of others, thereby annulling the wider social benefit."[5] Though this might perhaps be the case locally, this is an argument against increased productivity in general—and Häyry presumably does not want to go that way (curiously, he does not seem to be opposed to giving pregnant women iodized salt in order to promote their children's intelligence). Neither does it help to point out, as Häyry does, that increases in intelligence might have diminishing marginal utility. *All* goods have diminishing marginal utility, so this is an argument against *any* improvement, not an argument against an attempt at promoting intelligence.

In regard to his more specific criticisms, Häyry is also not convincing. Häyry raises questions about the heritability of intelligence, but this is scientifically uncontroversial, and his argument against my suggestion—although dramatically stated—is simply that, in my article, "some of the references are quite old, dating from the last millennium."[6] Some of my references are indeed more than 16 years old, but that does not make the findings mistaken. If Häyry thinks the findings are mistaken, he must point to solid studies that contradict them.

Häyry further suggests that my argument rests on the premise that "we do not have . . . [any] less ethically controversial ways of improving the lot of humanity available to us."[7] Clearly, there are less ethically controversial ways to improve the lot of humanity. We might, for example, give food to hungry people. That, however, is not the relevant question to ask. The relevant question to ask is if the marginal utility of spending money on promoting intelligence in the low-tech manner that I suggest might in fact be tolerably high in a long-term perspective. This does not exclude the possibility that there are other ways to improve humanity's lot that also deserve our attention.

Häyry further raises questions about the emotional, social, moral, political, and legal costs of my proposal. It is not entirely clear what he has in mind, however, and yet again, he does not substantiate his worries. What he does present is a fictional dialogue between two partners in which the husband clearly wants a child that is genetically his own ("Over my dead body," he says when his wife asks if they should use a sperm donor).[8] Häyry is probably right that many would react in this way. That, however, is not a big problem, for my suggestion is that the service should be voluntary, so those who do not want it may decline. Possibly, *no one* would find the service attractive, but in that case, nothing more is lost than the start-up costs.

Finally, Häyry asks if my proposal is indeed cost-efficient. Here the answer is that I do not know, and this is the reason I think the proposal ought to be explored by developmental and health economists. As I state explicitly, my point in "Bright New World" is not to sketch a plan to be implemented tomorrow but to provide a prima facie case, arguing that it might well be doable and that there seem to be no overriding moral reasons against it. I am open to the possibility that, after careful scrutiny, it might be found that



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the program should not be implemented. Häyry has not, however, shown that that is the case, so I take it that my prima facie case still stands.

## Notes

1. Moen OM. Bright new world. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2016;25(2): 282–7.
2. Häyry M. Increasing the sum total of general intelligence, as measured by individual IQ scores: What, how, and why? *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2016; 25:505–14.
3. See note 1, Häyry 2016, at 513.
4. See note 1, Häyry 2016, at 509.
5. See note 1, Häyry 2016, at 511.
6. See note 1, Häyry 2016, at 510.
7. See note 1, Häyry 2016, at 510.
8. See note 1, Häyry 2016, at 512.

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