Powerful new “gene editing” techniques have put the prospect of genetically modified human beings on the foreseeable horizon. Should we use these tools to improve the human species? Are they needed to prevent the transmission of genetic diseases? Would manipulating the genes of future children and generations open the door to new kinds of discrimination, inequality, and eugenics? Some forty countries, including most of Europe, have adopted laws prohibiting human heritable genetic modification, but the United States has not. Marcy Darnovsky unpacks the controversies that have erupted in recent months about how we should — and should not — use gene editing tools, and explores the technical, social, and ethical stakes of these imminent decisions.

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