Overall, a strong debate, with both teams offering much substance, and a genuine sense of a clash between the two teams. The speeches were on the whole markedly better than in past debates. Most impressive to me was the ability of each speaker to offer detailed and particular arguments without getting lost in those details. While there could still have been more architecture and rhetorical deliberateness in the speeches, they were thoughtfully organized, and most had at least an introduction and conclusion to orient the audience's perspective. Pace was excellent throughout and each speaker invested her words with a sense of candor and import; that is, speakers (usually) appeared to be thinking while speaking, not just saying the words but *meaning* them at the same time.

As usual, I am hard pressed to choose a victor in the debate. This is not just diplomacy on my part. Rather, each side had strengths and weaknesses in their arguments, and I was not convinced that one or the other side had ultimately gotten the upper hand. The affirmative team presented the only viable definition in the round, and used it (implicitly) to good effect, including things such as stem cell research and "cross breeding" under the definition of genetic engineering. The negative team challenged a number of these particular examples, but lacking a consistent alternate definition, could not make it clear just what cases should fall under genetic engineering in general. While the affirmative team did not convince me that all of these things ought to count as genetic engineering, their definitional dominance was nevertheless a point in their favor.

However, the affirmative strategy overall was not as aggressive or compelling as it might have been. Their primary argument, as far as I could tell, was to trot out long lists of things that genetic engineering has done or might do and say that these are good things. There were a few nods toward moral questions ("If we can help people, we are obliged to do so,") but the bulk of the argument was to show that lots of good may come of GE. The affirmative team does provide some specific responses to negative arguments, and some of these responses were good ones, but even the responses too often fell back on an extension of the list of good things that GE might provide.

The affirmative team did seem prepared to take on the question of risk, and the analysis of risk might have

become a key element in this debate had one side or the other been prepared to offer a more detailed argument. So while risk was something of a wash, the issue that affirmative most tellingly failed to address adequately was that of societal imbalance. Perhaps Samantha's extended discussion of cloning was intended to address this negative challenge, but I must admit that I wasn't entirely sure what this cloning thing was about. The affirmative team did point out that some aspects of GE technologies are likely to help the underprivileged most of all, and this was a good point, but still didn't quite take the bull by the horns. The argument, as presented by the negative team, is that if GE lets people choose their children's characteristics, this will widen the gap between wealthy and poor, since the wealthy will have more access to better child-choosing technologies, so that their children will be smarter, better looking, and better able to dominate poor people. Though possibly too science-fictional for us to appreciate its full impact, this to me is a deep concern and a likely outcome of the vigorous pursuit of GE. *Gattaca* feels all too real.

The negative certainly pushed this economic argument, but also muddled it by surrounding it with inflated worries about a world full of superhumans and the bizarre question of fetal consent. (This issue of consent is not irrelevant, but it's a tough argument to get off the ground. As the affirmative pointed out, fetuses never get to consent to anything about themselves. Of course, we do have standards of consent for human research subjects, but they probably don't apply in this case. Legal precedents allow for interventions in utero, without the fetus's consent, up to and including abortion!) The negative's strength in this debate was its willingness to push hard on the subtleties of the term "vigorously." By choosing to go after this one word, the negative shifted the nature of the debate and possibly caught the affirmative team off guard. For the negative team, arguing against the "vigorous pursuit" of GE leaves room to approve, at least somewhat, of GE in general and still take a negative stance on the resolution. To claim that there are too many other problems that demand our resources, such that we should not vigorously pursue something as risky and uncertain as GE, was a good strategy, and went almost completely ignored by the affirmative team. Though I believe that the negative team won this issue in the debate (almost by default), I am not personally convinced that it is sound reasoning. That is, I

am not convinced that vigorous pursuit of genetic engineering really competes very much for resources with the other projects we should pursue. Even if we commit ourselves to solving the various other problems that the negative team pointed out, there may still be plenty of room (and resources) to pursue genetic engineering, even vigorously.

The negative team offered a number of other compelling points, and overall had a much broader range of arguments than the affirmative's single-minded strategy, but many of these points would have been more effective had they been better defended. The issue of risk for instance was not analyzed enough to become much more than a shouting match between the two sides. But the negative team could have pointed to much more specific examples of the ways in which GE is a risky proposition. Alex's rebuttal speech did offer some of these arguments, and they were good ones, but these arguments should have been introduced earlier in the round. The heartiness and disease resistance of genetically engineered plants cuts both ways; though they require less pesticides they also tend to produce stronger pests. Moreover, genetically engineered crops are hard to test for safety; they tend to escape the fields in which they are grown and take over other fields, wiping out other strains of the crop and disrupting ecosystems. There is empirical evidence of this happening already, as farmers who grow non-GE crops have discovered that their fields are hosting hybrids and GE crops from neighboring "experiments." These sorts of arguments and evidence could have swung the question of risk in favor of the negative.

Otherwise, I want to reemphasize that I am impressed and pleased at the progress we have seen in the debates this semester. Every speaker was articulate. Each speech was better organized. And the arguments were meaningful and real. Great job, and a most enjoyable debate to witness.

Carolyn,

Your debate speech demonstrated an unheralded mastery over your nerves. Your pace was excellent and your words articulate without ever seeming forced or unconscious. You treated the subject matter with an appropriate gravity but were still able to understand it personally. I quite enjoyed your comment about seedless watermelon: "which I personally happen to like very much." You came across as human and individual while still expert and engaged in your topic. There were no ums or awkward pauses. You made sure to include a clear introduction and conclusion. Excellent job.

My only criticism of the speech is the same one I leveled at the affirmative team in general: it relied on a list of examples, as though in themselves they constitute an argument. To some extent, this was an appropriate strategy for the first affirmative speech, showing what's great about genetic engineering and then waiting for the negative team's challenge. But it probably would have been even stronger to anticipate some of the potential sources of controversy surrounding your topic and stake your claim before the argument even gets started. This would have advanced the debate itself while also tilting things toward the affirmative side.

Your cross-examinations were also very well conducted. Alex's interrogation of you was a great question period, with Alex asking leading questions and you offering honest but powerful responses. You refused to fall into his trap, thoughtfully admitting to the subtlety of the situation without giving much ground. Your cross-examination of Asiri was a bit more iffy, as you allowed Asiri to be the aggressor, and though his questions kept you off balance in the first half of the cross-x period, you reversed the momentum in the second half, as Asiri seemed to lose track of the argument. It's kind of a debater's trick, but it is often effective to stick to your role in a cross-examination, refusing to answer questions if you are the interrogator and waiting to be asked one if you are the interrogated.

In general, the strength of your speaking was its candor, as you addressed the issues without hype and with great clarity and conviction.
1.8 out of 2

Linda,

Your opening speech for the negative side of the resolution had the great advantage of being filled with substantive arguments. A number of these arguments were simply not addressed by affirmative responses and, as such, were successful by default (though I'm not really keeping score). Though some of these arguments seemed to me somewhat contrived or poorly aimed, most were sound and could have been further pursued to dig deeper into the nature of the resolution.

Overall, my sense is that this speech would have been more effective had there been fewer arguments offered in at a slower pace and with more explanation surrounding each. For instance, your opening claim about the pressing importance of many other problems that have nothing to do with genetic engineering is a good point. But for this point to really hit home, you would need to offer a more thoughtful analysis of your various comparisons, showing in each case that the problem in question really is more pressing than the ones that GE proposes to solve and that the problem in question will not get solved by the vigorous pursuit of GE. If the lack of clean water really is our greatest concern, are you certain that genetic engineering offers no promise to solve this problem? And disease, which was second on your list of problems, seems like an ideal candidate for treatment by GE. My point is not that you were wrong to raise this issue. Rather, by rattling off this list without really thinking about each case, you are asking your audience to take it on faith that your argument makes sense, and this serves neither your audience nor the truth. Even something like "civil wars in Africa" might potentially be allayed through genetic engineering, if, that is, GE lives up to its promise of making food plentiful and cheap around the world. (It's a big IF, and I have no faith that GE is the right solution to our social problems, but simply to assert that GE is unrelated to such problems is inadequate.)

As I said in my general comments, your claim about the gap between rich and poor was to me the strongest and most interesting issue in the debate. However, as I also said, the introduction of this issue in terms of "choice-based liberalism" was at best distracting and at worst confusing. There are undoubtedly ethical issues that arise when messing directly with human DNA, but to locate these

ethical issues in the question of fetal choice (as a political question) is rather too indirect. That is, the ethical questions about genetic engineering are not primarily questions about consensual testing, even if such questions of consent are somewhere at the periphery of the ethics of GE. And fetal consent is only remotely tied to choice-based liberalism, which would need to be defended as a valuable basis for organizing society if it is supposed to serve as a platform for claims made during the debate. As such, my sense is that this issue was just the wrong focus, but perhaps it could have been salvaged had you slowed down and examined it more carefully.

Your cross-examinations were very entertaining. Samantha's questions for you led to some excellent clash, and where you were unwilling to clash you cleverly answered a different question from the one you were asked. A weaker debater would have given ground during this cross-examination, but you managed to hold yours quite well. Your examination of Jiji was less gratifying, as the clash was more emotional than conceptual; she completely failed to answer most of your questions, and you came across as more expert, but you could probably have made her look even worse by remaining calm and showing her to be the one who is flustered and confused. On balance, your cross-examinations are exemplars for the class, and I hope everyone else was paying attention.
1.7 out of 2

Jiji,

Your second affirmative speech was a bit of a contradiction. You included lots of excellent phrasings and many superb examples of the benefits of genetic engineering. But, as most of your speech was prewritten, your verbatim reading kept you from making good contact with your audience, and you did not do enough to address the concerns raised in the first negative speech. My sense is that this position in the debate, second speaker on either team, calls for a maximum of flexibility, as you have to respond to the other side while continuing to raise original arguments for your own position. Writing out parts of your speech beforehand allows you to be extra articulate, but limits your flexibility.

Though your pace was fantastic and words utterly clear and well chosen, your affect seemed somewhat flat, as though you were not investing your words with meaning in the moment. This is one of the risks of reading, as it is difficult to make words come alive when read aloud. Perhaps it was also an artifact of the comparison between your speech and the others around you, as you came across as very knowledgeable but slightly disinterested. You did do a good job of organizing your ideas, and your conclusion, though possibly too brief, was a smart way of leaving your audience with a clear summary of your perspective.

Your arguments did not engage quite enough with the negative points. Though you went over a couple of them, you then fell back on your team's strategy of listing the good things that GE can do. These are compelling reasons you offer to pursue GE, but if they don't reckon with the objections, the audience is left with no clear way to decide which policy to favor.

Your cross-examination by Linda was very entertaining, as your aplomb seemed to get her a bit flustered. My sense was that you weren't quite answering the questions, but you offered your responses with confidence and directness, making them seem believable even if slightly off target. Linda didn't manage to really pin you down, but you might have avoided giving the impression of being slightly cagey had you offered more confrontational answers. On the question of fetal choice, for instance, it would have been more direct just to point out that fetuses never get a choice about their lives.

Overall, you have great poise and delivery and could be a very imposing debater. But it would require staying more in the moment, keeping your ideas in play in your head, and offering them to your audience with that same crystal clarity.

1.2 out of 2

Asiri,

Your second negative speech was the strongest I have seen you deliver yet this semester. The facts and argument you made, especially at the beginning of the speech, not only advanced the negative position but gave you an air of authority and expertise that made subsequent claims all the more believable. Your delivery was clear, and I didn't notice any "fading out" at the ends of your sentences. Your style was casual and direct, but thoughtful at the same time, and you seemed to take your own arguments seriously. Good job.

This speech also had some weaknesses. A couple of the points were not adequately explained or analyzed (your single sentence about biodiversity, for instance). And you seemed to lose strength as the speech went on; the arguments near the end were much less developed and articulate. Ending abruptly with no conclusion was also probably a mistake, as you should at least put in a short sentence reminding your audience who to "vote" for. But the first part of your speech demonstrates your increasing ability at this task.

Your cross-examination session with Carolyn was also very well done. You did a great job taking the upper hand in this interrogation period, as you almost immediately became the questioner, putting her on the defensive. You seemed most confident regarding this issue of risk, so it worked in your favor that this issue dominated most of the cross-x session. Like in the speech, you seemed to falter a bit near the end of the question period, as Carolyn got back on track as the questioner, and you weren't sure how to fend off her continued challenges to your examples. Still, neither side gained ground here, and you explained your ideas well. Overall nice job and most entertaining.
1.4 out of 2

Alex,

Your negative rebuttal speech offered a great deal of substantive commentary, taking the various complexities of the debate and describing them in terms both subtle and concrete. That is, your strength in this speech was to respect the complexity of the ideas you were discussing while still making genuine interventions. There was a sense in your speech that the ideas had been up until that point somehow uncertain, that the clash had been emotionally apparent but conceptually hazy. Your speech resolved that haziness, not only by taking a clear side, but also by explaining in clear terms what the debate was about to that point. Excellent job.

In some ways, the primary flaw in your speech is that it didn't come earlier in the debate round. This is partly because you were advancing some arguments whose novelty was questionable; that is, debating rules require that rebuttal speeches refrain from introducing new arguments, though they may certainly rebut old arguments and rephrase or further explain already existing arguments. Maybe I was fooled by the clarity of your explanations into thinking that you were making up a new argument rather than just reiterating an older one. In any case, this kind of clarity earlier in the debate would have taken the debate to another level.

Your claims were themselves compelling, and I must admit that this was the only point in the debate when the negative side seemed appealing to me. (I don't mean to say that the affirmative team had me convinced; for the most part, I found neither side terribly convincing, but your arguments were the ones I felt I most needed to reckon with, given my prior leanings toward the affirmative on this resolution.) This strong content was packaged in a direct and confident manner that did not become cocky or aggressive. This was a good tone to take. Your introduction and conclusion helped to keep the audience on track.

Your cross-examination performance was also strong, though not compelling in the same way. You were trying to open up a gap around the word "vigorously," a gap that the negative team planned to exploit with a wedge later. While your strategy was a good one, Carolyn gave great answers to your queries, offering direct responses instead of evasive ones, and even allowing for significant subtlety in her

evaluation of the situation. The result was that "vigorous" was still up for grabs at the end of the interrogation, your strong questions having been met by equally strong answers.

1.8 out of 2

Samantha,

Your closing speech packaged strong content, responding directly to the chief attacks by the negative team. You augmented your responses with good control over your tone of voice, as you seemed both impassioned and serious. Your use of intonation and pace was the strongest in the debate, and your commitment to the issue really helps to make your speech engaging and believable. You even came across as incredulous regarding some of the negative claims, and while this technique could get overused, you pulled it off quite well.

The organization of your speech was not as strong, however. Too often you seemed to be providing a list of arguments, and you didn't do enough to contextualize these arguments. Starting an objection with "You say that … but actually …," does demonstrate your own involvement in the issue, but it doesn't give the audience time to get their heads around these things. Instead, you should briefly explain the negative's position, speaking to the audience, then offer your response to it. Try to find ways to segue from one argument to the next, and give your listeners a sense of what is most important. This is my old complaint about architecture in a speech: organize it around something more than a list of ideas.

And architecture might have helped you to make stronger arguments as well. My sense (and I could be wrong) is that you got distracted by certain aspects of the debate that may not really have been central. As the rebuttal speaker, your job is to choose only those issues that have risen to the very top of the debate, to highlight the affirmative perspective on the "voting issues." Instead, your need to discuss cloning seemed somewhat renegade, as the negative team had not been talking about cloning (even if they had discussed some related issues). This fixation on a "pet" topic is particularly ineffective when you don't explain to the audience the overall relevance of this topic to your argument. Had you explained in slow, clear terms that cloning can serve as a representative issue for all of the different issues surrounding human genetic engineering, and had you made this claim believable, then perhaps your argument would have held more weight.

Your cross-examination of Linda was a good moment in the debate, and helped to heat up the exchange between the two

teams. You were asking relevant, aggressive questions, and Linda managed to meet your questions with believable, consistent responses. Neither of you gained the upper hand during this interrogation, but only because you both did very good jobs.

1.5 out of 2