

Ask A Genius 23 - The Future of Genetic Engineering 3

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Scott: What about the business of genetic engineering?

Rick: Genetic engineering will be a gigantic industry. I don't know if one or more companies will dominate the industry as Apple has dominated its segment of the hardware industry and Microsoft has dominated software.

Companies that can successfully do genetic engineering will make money. It might start with the ability to extend lifespans, even indefinitely. The ability to change drives and abilities, that stuff is going to be more valuable than real estate or cars, or anything.

Some economists have tried to calculate how many extra months or years of life are worth to people, and that's a tough calculation to make, but the answer is at its roughest a hell-of-a-lot.

If you are 70 years old, and you have assets of a million-and-a-half dollars as bunch of Americans and others in developed countries have earned or saved to pay for their retirements, those people might pay 5% for each of those accumulated assets for each extra year of healthy life.

I think if you do the math on that right there, then that's trillions of dollars. Companies will try to get that money. So, a lot of other stuff like a bunch of genetic engineering will be market driven, which is both good and bad.

It will lead to the same kinds of weirdnesses and excesses that other market driven industries offer. When people in the 60s talked about what we might use computers for, it was serious. It had nothing to do with the Candy Crush games or the Angry Bird stuff.

It had nothing about what people do with computers all of the time. We can extrapolate that among the side stuff of genetic engineering of extending lives or curing disease. There will be a lot of foolishness, awesome foolishness.

If people can make dogs that use them, then people might make dogs with hands. They might open refrigerators to get bottles, whatever's in the bottles like olives.

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