

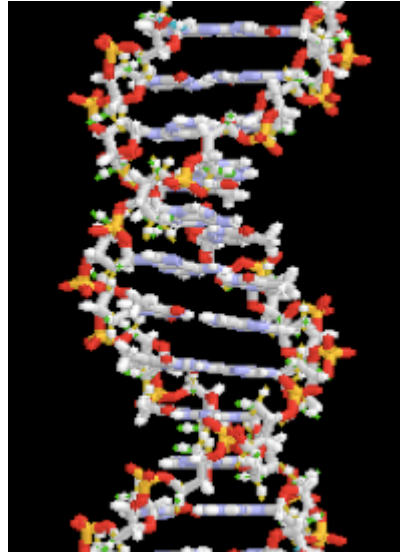


Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 7, 2009

IBM developing DNA 'bar code reader'

As advances in the field of genetics continue at a dizzying pace, one calls to mind the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century: "Hell is full of good intentions or desires."

Several months ago, [a published study](#) revealed that DNA evidence can be faked, raising concerns that criminals, or governments, could easily falsify genetic evidence against their enemies. Now IBM is finishing work on a DNA Transistor which will allow quick analysis of the specific genetic makeup of any individual.



According to a [report](#) by FoxNews.com:

The DNA Transistor is a project from IBM Research that aims to advance personalized medicine, by making it simpler (and much cheaper) to read an individual's unique DNA sequence — the special combination of proteins that makes you unlike anyone else.

The technology isn't finished yet, but its potential is tantalizing [sic] enough that IBM wanted to share it with the world. And the company claims researchers are making progress.

Essentially a bar code reader for genes, the DNA Transistor is part technique and part device. It consists of a 3-nanometer wide hole, known as a *nanopore*, in a silicon microchip. A sensor in the pore can read DNA and determine its unique makeup....

"The technologies that make reading DNA fast, cheap and widely available have the potential to revolutionize bio-medical research and herald an era of personalized medicine," said IBM research scientist Gustavo Stolovitzky. "Ultimately, it could improve the quality of medical care by identifying patients who will gain the greatest benefit from a particular medicine and those who are most at risk of adverse reaction."

From a medical standpoint, the potential for the DNA Transistor is truly phenomenal. The problems develop, however, in keeping with the law of unintended consequences. "Fast, cheap, and widely available" technologies for reading the precise details of any individual's genetic code open up a whole new world of discrimination and invasions of privacy. When a single hair can be a 'tell all' exposé of genetic predispositions to everything from cancers and heart conditions to a propensity to addictions or violence, employers can weed out expensive employees before they even hire them; a "fast, cheap, and widely available" test at birth can tell a government-controlled healthcare system how 'productive' or 'beneficial' a person may be to society; perhaps those who have genetic markers linked to violent behaviors could be required to be registered and monitored? After all, such things wouldn't be "racial profiling," it would all be very orderly, consistent, and 'scientific.'

If such scenarios sound extreme, consider how rapidly most citizens have capitulated to the notion of cameras constantly monitoring them in public places "for their own good." The uses to which men employ technology need have nothing to do with the intentions of those who developed the technologies



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in the first place, and every benefit gained must be weighed against the risks, with steps taken to mitigate the dangers. The most severe dangers to our liberties are posed by the combination of a culture of moral relativism — even moral vacuity — with growing technological prowess.



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