

ENGLISH: SPEECH

Designer Babies

Bring your partner, grab a seat, pick up your baby catalogue and start choosing. Will you go for the brown hair or blond? Would you prefer tall or short? Funny or clever? Girl or boy? And do you want them to be a muscle-bound sports hero? Or a slender and intelligent book worm? When you're done selecting, head to the counter and it's time to start creating your new child.

Does this sound like a scary thought?

You all may know designer babies or genetically engineered babies are a prominent issue in today's society. Although it may seem irrelevant now but we are the ones who should be most concerned as by the time we are nearing parenthood it will be increasingly prevalent to have custom made babies.

Basically a designer baby is formed when an embryo is screened for genetic diseases as well as physical and psychological traits before being implanted into the mother. I think it's great that technology today can eliminate genetic diseases but if we allow it to happen, there is no doubt in my mind that certain parents and scientists will misuse the technology. Under the technology it is not only possible to eliminate genetic diseases but also choose traits such as gender, height, eye colour, hair colour and even intelligence. In fact gender selection is happening all over California America. For 19000 dollars one can select the gender of their baby. We are risking a future filled with gender and ecological imbalance. As well as risking this technology falling into the wrong hands. That is not acceptable.

Adolph Hitler (one of the most notoriously evil men of the 20th century) and his Nazi party set out to design the perfect human race. To do this they would eliminate all undesirable people. Both Hitler and the Nazis believed that they could achieve their goal through the use of mass sterilization, horrific experimentation, and genocide.

When we look back at this time in history, we do so with horror. One man's desire to create the perfect race led to the death of millions of people. Yet, when it comes to the concept of designer babies we may not have gone quite that far but we are heading down a similar path. Human beings are supposed to be imperfect, and to make an attempt to change that would be inhumane. "We are what we are" and we should be born how we were meant to be. Using these techniques we may be able to lower rates of genetic disease however there may be dire consequences to the average person like you or me. We will go from being average to under privileged and shunned from society.

Today both genetic and reproductive sciences have come a long way since Hitler ruled Germany. We can now identify many genetic disorders (like Down's Syndrome and Tay-Sachs disease) as well as physical traits such as gender before a child is even born. Using tests like amniocentesis and CVS (Chorionic Villi Sampling), doctors can detect birth defects in the unborn child and then parents can decide to abort the fetus. However is this ethical when no test is perfect? It is definitely possible to receive a positive result when no disease is present. Just think how many human lives will needlessly be aborted due to a test that may not be correct. In a recent study done by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 671 women had a CVS test to detect defects in their baby. It was found that out of 671 women, 2.5% were incorrectly told that their child would be born with a genetic defect and given the option to abort. Now it doesn't sound like much but that is 17 lives potentially destroyed.

The question still remains should we use these advances in science to create designer babies? Should we be allowed to selectively procreate? What happens if say a culture, like China, who value boy babies above girl babies, and who have already limited the number of babies that a couple can produce, decide to design just boy babies? What will be the future of their race?

Another thought, what if we use our research to eliminate all genetically transmitted diseases such as haemophilia and Huntington's disease? Doesn't this sound ideal? We all would like to believe that no person should have to suffer; that all disease could be eliminated. But, is it a solution? Or, will solving the problem of genetically transmitted disease actually create greater problems?

It would drastically affect world population. It would have a huge impact on the earth's ecological balance? The population, as it exists today, has already been stretched to the limits of our available resources. Besides who's to say that people with say Down syndrome are not happy. We have every right to live even if we are not perfect in every way. No human is perfect and no human should ever be.

Some advocates who believe that designer babies should be legalised argue that parents should have the right to manipulate their baby's traits. They would have us all believe that children are commodities, things to be designed or manufactured. Furthermore they expect us to believe that it's best for our children. They say that without ever asking children how they feel about it. I found the anecdote by a 16 year old on the comment section of an article.

"I can't... believe how some people think that choosing a certain gene to make your child super better at stuff is a good thing. I'm 16 and I stink at math but im REALLY REALLY trying because I like math. I would hate being really talented in math just cuz my mom choose it to be so.- I wouldn't get the chance to see myself smile for getting an answer right, or telling my teacher that I wana get real good on my own so I can help other people in the future"

So just how far have we come from the days of Hitler? Mankind is once again delving into an ethical hornet's nest (possibly leading to the destruction of life as we know it). We are meddling in things best left alone and untouched. We are ignoring the what-ifs. What if we caused a gender imbalance? What if an evil man like Hitler got hold of this technology? And worst of all what if the average person like you or me became a second lower class race? So 15 or 20 years from now when you are ready to have kids and have the option to create a designer baby ... I urge you all to think of what if.