SHOULD WE BE ABLE TO CHOOSE OUR KIDS?

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With the recent advancements in genetic technology, topics such as stem cell research, human cloning, and genetic engineering have come to the forefront of ethical debate. Genetic technology as such has the power to redefine the human race. This technology could be implemented, and help circumvent crippling diseases that would lead to sorrow and death. However, in the wise words of Einstein “technological progress is like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal.” The implications of the misuse of genetic technology have grave moral, ethical, and social ramifications. Therefore, the goal of this paper and corresponding presentation is to highlight the various benefits and negative aspects of using genetic engineering to produce a “designer baby.”

There are few but growing examples of the use of genetic technology. Monkeys have recently been cloned. Promising genetic engineering techniques to cure disease are quickly being developed. One could argue that our ethical grounds for understanding such a technology are woefully lacking relative to the progress of research. If one assumes that the purpose of genetic engineering to create more viable offspring, then man kind has been pondering this issue for decades. Such thought can be directly observed in movies. For example, in the movie “GATTACA,” the main character is of the upper class that has been genetically altered with the most desirable mental and physical traits. One can clearly see the disparity and unfairness that occurs when genetic engineering is only used for a select subset of the population. On the other hand, one could also take the “GATTACA” example and extend it. What if every human being had the opportunity to ensure that their offspring would have the most desirable traits? Would that not be the next step in further evolving the human race?

Such questions have no answers. Humanity as a whole is complex. There are moral and ethical principles that need to be considered. By altering nature, have we truly bettered the human race? One example that is occurring now is a case where a family has a child with a life threatening blood disorder. In order to save this child, they are attempting to exploit genetic technology with the hope that the second child will be a perfect tissue match with the first, and he could “donate” bone marrow (or anything else) to help his brother. So, is it ethically right for parents to create a second child for “spare parts?” Some would argue that a naturally occurring twin could donate an organ to his or her sibling, and probably most people would see no harm in this practice. One could create a counter argument that the twin example is not relevant because a child was not produced under the guise that he or she could save a life via tissue donation. In short there is no right answer in this case.

Because humanity is complex one has to consider emotions. What if a child was designed to be a football player, have a high IQ, be the perfect gentleman, etc? And what if the said child decided to practice ballet and enter trade school? There is a disparity between the parent’s wants and the child’s wants. This could create tension because of the preconceived ideas of the parents. In short, do parents have the right to choose their children?

In conclusion, the area of “designer children” is a complex topic. At one extreme, such a technology, though it is many years away could be used to cure disease and could be used in an altruistic fashion. However, at the other extreme, such a technology could be abused and misused, as in engineering of a class of people for “spare parts”. With proper consideration, conversations and debates will help people make appropriate decisions.
References