

Genetically Modified Babies?

The Future Is Now

Designer babies are looking more and more like a reality whose time is imminent.

Piggybacking on recent research [which allows](#) scientists “to rewrite the DNA bound up in living cells,” an ethics panel in the U.K. just released a report which suggests this maneuvering of genetics is “morally permissible.”

The announcement does not come without cautions, however. As the ethics panel [makes clear](#), such a move must ensure the “welfare” of those who are born via this genetically modified process. To their credit, the panel acknowledges that welfare is more than simply “good health,” for it includes social and psychological wellbeing of both the individual and society at large. As the panel explains:

“The use of heritable genome editing interventions should be consistent with social justice and solidarity so that it should not be expected to increase disadvantage, discrimination, or division in society.”

Unfortunately, this is where things get tricky. As biologist Paul Knoepfler makes clear in the lecture below, genetically modified babies stand to be smarter, more beautiful, and more athletic than those born naturally. These “perfect” children will in turn outshine the natural ones, accentuating an inequality driven by families wealthy enough to afford a genetically modified child.

But what if inequality was not an issue? In such a case, would designer babies still be something to avoid?

C.S. Lewis prophetically addressed this issue in his 1944

work, [The Abolition of Man](#). According to him, such a state signaled the end of humanity as we know it:

“The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. We shall have ‘taken the thread of life out of the hand of Clotho’ and be henceforth free to make our species whatever we wish it to be.”

Lewis further notes that the knowledge which we currently see unfolding via genetically modified babies will not make us a greater, more powerful society, but will instead make us much weaker:

“In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them.”

On the surface, the concept of genetically modified babies sounds wonderful, for it could cure diseases and create greater happiness.

But is it possible these benefits aren't all they're made out to be? If Lewis is correct, could tampering with our offspring have serious ramifications for the future of humanity, its strength and morality?

[Image Credit: [Max Pixel](#)]