A couple just got married. Hooray! The couple has been saving up some money for a new car. They have saved up enough money, and today is the day that they will make their first big purchase as a married couple. They head on over to the Pontiac dealer and begin looking around the lot. The couple spots a brand new Grand Prix. They really like the car, but it simply is not the color they are looking for, and it is lacking some of the accessories and features that might be nice to have. A car salesman approaches the couple to see if they could use any assistance. They express to the salesman that they are interested in the Grand Prix, but they were hoping for a different color and possibly some additional features. The salesmen says that it is no big deal, and that if they wanted to they could special order a Grand Prix that was exactly what they were looking for. The couple is thrilled. The salesman brings them inside and hands them a list of options that they can use to select the perfect car. Color? Red. Air Conditioning? Yes. Chrome wheels? Yes. Seat warmers? Yea Baby! The couple designs the perfect car, and then the salesman sends their order out to the Pontiac factory so their car can be custom built. Quite the shopping experience.

After an amazing year of wedded bliss, the couple decides they are ready for their next big purchase as a married couple — a baby. They hop in their Grand Prix and head down to the Reproductive Genetic Institute. They want to design a baby in hopes that their child will begin life with the best possible chance to become successful. The doctor brings them inside his office and hands them a list of options that they can use to select the perfect child. Sex? Male. Height? Six foot. Eye color? Blue. IQ? 130. Athletic? the next Michael Jordan. The list goes on and on. The woman is given a shot so that she ovulates multiple times, and the doctor collects her eggs.
The sperm of her husband is collected, and it’s baby making time! The couple could not be happier about the baby they have designed, so the doctor sends their order out to the laboratory—along with the eggs and sperm—so that their baby can be custom built. Talk about the shopping experience.

As crazy as this might seem, in the not so distant future this will become a reality. In fact, some of this is being done right now. Scientists continue to learn more about the human genome, and as they do reproductive technology continually advances to levels that we never imagined. Researchers linked to Bionet point out:

Advanced reproductive techniques involve using InVitro Fertilization (IVF), which is where eggs are fertilized by sperm in ‘test tubes’ outside the mother’s body in a laboratory. The type of sperm (X or Y) that fertilizes an egg can be chosen, which is used to determine the sex and genes of the baby. The embryos can be screened for genetic diseases, and only selected embryos are implanted back into the mother’s womb. This technique is called Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis or PGD. (Bionet par. 2)

Michael Lemonick, a writer for Time, shows in his article “Designer Babies” that these techniques allow doctors and parents to reduce the chance that a child will be born with a genetic disorder. It must be catching on because each year in the U.S. about 25,000 kids are born by IVF (Lemonick par.16).

As good of an idea as designer babies sound, they have brought up a host of questions regarding whether the reproductive technology is morally wrong. The whole idea of shopping for a baby seems a little unethical to some people. But others argue that if parents could use preimplantation genetic diagnosis to obtain immunity to HIV, cancer, and heart disease before
birth then it would be morally correct to do (Derbyshire par. 5). For some, it is hard to see what is morally wrong with preventing a child from suffering from a life threatening disease. After looking at both sides of the argument, I believe that parents should legally be allowed to use reproductive genetic techniques in terms of preventing and curing genetic diseases for their children, but the technology must be strictly regulated by the federal government to ensure that it is only used for that purpose.

Arguments for Designer Babies

One of the arguments for designer babies is that couples who are unable to have children because they would be born with a fatal genetic diseases would now be given the long awaited opportunity to start a family. The genetic makeup of the baby would be changed so that the child could be born free of any genetic diseases. The prayers of some couples would be answered; giving them the chance to create a healthy child that they could call their own.

Supporters of designer babies also claim that IVF and PGD are used to do what is best for the child. Often times parents try to mold their children into what they think will make them the most successful, and now parents would conveniently be able to do that molding before the child is even born. They would assert that they are doing what any child would want. What child wouldn’t want to be smarter, healthier, and better looking? The parents know what is best for the child, and they simply are trying to start their children off in this world with the best opportunity to have a successful life.

The use of reproductive technology would save children from suffering, and reduce the overall cost and emotional strain of looking after a sick child (Bionet par.6 ). Looking after a disease stricken child would become time consuming and exhausting after a while, and all this
hassle could be eliminated by taking advantage of recent medical technology. No more sitters, no more special medical attention, and no more worrying. The price of the IVF and PGD would quickly pay for themselves in terms of the overall cost and emotional strain caused by raising a deathly ill child.

One of the strongest arguments for the use of designer babies is that it prevents certain genetic diseases. PGD can screen for about a dozen of the most serious genetic diseases including: cystic fibrosis, Tay Sachs, various familial cancers, early onset Alzheimer’s, sickle cell disease, hemophilia, neurofibromatosis, muscular dystrophy, and Fanconi’s anemia (Bailey par. 3) and (Lemonick 1). With further testing of the human genome it is said that nearly all of the genetic diseases could be avoided by using reproductive genetic techniques. Erika Jonietz interviewed Gregory Stock, director of the UCLA program of medicine, technology, and society in hopes of learning more about the capabilities of designer baby technology. Stock went on to say, “Soon, such testing will move to a broad array of potential genetic diseases” (Jonietz par.5). Undoubtedly these techniques will push medical technologies to the next level, and provide a way to prevent and cure genetic diseases in the future.

The last argument for designer babies is they can be used to make a second child to act as a future blood and bone marrow donor for an earlier child. The second child is born healthy and can prevent the older child from getting sick. The first baby used for this purpose was born on August 29, 2000. Adam Nash was a designer baby who was created to be free from the gene that causes Fanconi’s anemia, which infected his sister Molly. Fanconi anemia is a rare genetic disorder that prevents bone marrow from being born in the body. Molly needed a successful bone marrow transplant to survive, and the odds of a successful transplant increase when the donor is a sibling. According to Stuart Derbyshire, a writer for the British Medical Journal: “Shortly after
his birth, Adam became a donor to his sister and on 4 January 2001 the family went home following a successful procedure at the University of Minnesota Medical Center” (Derbyshire par. 1). The reproductive technology was used to save Molly Nash’s life. Supporters of this technology would argue that the fact that the technology is saving lives is enough reason to continue its practice.

Arguments Against Designer Babies

The Adam Nash case also spawned critics of designer babies who argue that the second child, who is used to prevent the older sibling from getting deathly sick, will feel like they were only made to help older sibling. In other words, parents are creating a child to act as an organ-donating factory. They say the child may be treated as a commodity, and not loved and cherished as another member of the family. Some people would also argue that, “the use of such technology to avoid disability undermines the rights of disabled people, encourages selfish and even eugenic tendencies among parents, and violates natural laws that should be respected” (Derbyshire par. 3). It is obvious that the feelings and well being of the second child is causing much concern, and it is not hard to see why.

Another argument against designer babies is that they would lead to imbalances between the rich and the poor. Ronald Bailey describes the cost of advanced reproductive technologies in an article he wrote in Reason entitled “Hooray for Designer Babies.” According to Bailey, IVF will run a couple about $7,500 due to the medical and lab staff needed to perform the procedure. Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis will cost an additional $2,500 (Bailey par. 4). To some that is a large amount of money, to others that is pocket change. There is the possibility that the rich will get richer, and the poor will get poorer. Right now it is not possible to genetically enhance
physical or physiological traits, but in the future it may be possible. Parents may be able to
designate the intelligence, athletic ability, musical talent, and even personality type of their
children. The parents who are fortunate enough to be able to afford these reproductive techniques
will be able to give their children an edge in becoming what is considered successful in our
society. Success will become easier to obtain. It is feared that a form of super humans will be
created that look down on those who are not genetically enhanced (Bionet par.3). There will be a
new breed of people, those who are not genetically enhanced, who will be discriminated against.

It is not hard believe that the mainstream religions in our country are going to have a strong
opinion on such a controversial issue like designer babies. The main argument that Christianity
brought up was that the misuse of designer babies would result in humans losing their
specialness. According to the Christian view point, what makes humans special is that we can
limit ourselves, to recognize that something may be perfectly understandable and yet be wrong
(McKibben 26). Bill McKibben writes in his article “Design-a-kid” that “The choices we face, in
fact, will settle this question on specialness once and for all. If we cannot summon our ability to
use self-restraint, or if it proves to be weak, we will leave our specialness behind forever.” The
fear is that if we escape our limits we will ultimately become — nothing (McKibben 28).

One other fear is that reproductive genetic enhancing will get carried away and be misused
for what some would consider perverse reasons. Julian Savulescu shows any example of this in
an article he wrote for the British Medical Journal in 2002. He describes a situation where a deaf
lesbian couple deliberately created a deaf child. Sharon Duchesneau and Candy McCullough
chose the sperm of one of their friends who had five generations of deafness in his family. The
dead lesbian couple does not see deafness as a disability; rather they think being deaf makes
someone unique and define their cultural identity (Savulescu 2). They also wanted a deaf child
because it would make it so much easier to communicate to their child in their own language. Despite the couple’s opinion, doctors would state that deafness is a disability. Savulescu states that “Deaf people are denied the world of sound, music and most fundamental form of communication” (Savulescu 2). It is for this reason that many people would consider purposely creating deaf babies as the “most perverse manifestation of creating designer babies” (Savulescu 3). Experts also claim that “Sex selection will undoubtedly raise knotty issues as well. Societies that value boys more highly than girls, including China and India, are already out of balance; this could tip the scales even further” (Lemonick 2). These societies may be tempted to use this technology as a way of ensuring that they receive a baby boy. If misused, this technology could ultimately have disastrous affects on society.

Strictly Medical Purposes: Regulation by the Government

Both sides of the designer baby debate have valid arguments that must be considered when looking at the best path to take with this highly controversial technology. There is something very appealing about the possibility to be able to design a baby, yet at the same time a voice in the back of my head tells me that the technology could be misused to manipulate nature in sick, twisted ways. Babies are not something that should be ordered. But, kids and adults alike should not be put in a situation where they have to suffer through a fatal disease if the suffering could be prevented in the first place. Why live with early onset Alzheimer’s or muscular dystrophy if you don’t have to?

One fact remains without question, reproductive genetic technology can be used to prevent genetic diseases. Isn’t that what medicine is supposed to do? Cure and prevent diseases. It is really hard to argue against something that is saving lives, and producing healthier babies. The
problem comes when people start using the technology for purposes outside of prevention and treatment of diseases, and the only way cut back on these misuses of the technology is through strict regulation by the federal government.

Knowing that the technology must be regulated, I feel that parents should be allowed to use it in terms of preventing and curing diseases for their children. It is hard to see any ethical problems with preventing suffering and helping people to live longer, healthier lives. And when looking at the price of the procedures, the money would be well spent. They cost about half as much as a new car. You could bring two healthy children into the world for the price of a new Grand Prix. It would be much more costly to raise a sick child — financially and emotionally — then it would be to take advantage of the genetic enhancing procedures. Healthy children? New car? Not a hard choice.

Parents should also be able to bring a second child into the world as a way to prevent an older sibling from getting sick. In this case the parents are still using the technology for medical purposes in terms of preventing and curing diseases for their children. I see nothing morally wrong with techniques that are being used to save lives. The new baby will not be treated as a commodity—but as a loved member of the family. Writers of the BBC organization claim that “The new baby will be loved for its own sake, and the special techniques being used are being used to bring additional benefits from the birth” (Religion par. 11). I don’t think Adam Nash was treated any differently by his parents then they treated Molly. I cannot imagine him being locked up in his room, given bread and water, and treated like a commodity. His purpose in life was served, and there is no longer a need for him. In fact, I’m sure it was quite the opposite. Adam was treated as a much loved member of the family, and his birth symbolizes the good that can come from this technology.
As stated earlier, if the technology is used for reasons outside of medical purposes it will ultimately have dangerous affects on society. Federal regulation must be established to ensure that IVF and PGD procedures are not abused by parents. If genetic enhancement is not restricted to medical purposes then the rich will get richer, and the poor will get poorer. I think parents will try to “one-up” other parents when it comes time to make a baby. Parents will compete to see who can make their kids the smartest, most athletic, and best looking. It will be like the two neighbors who try to put up the grandest display of Christmas lights every year. The people who can do the “one-uping” are those who have the cash to spend on such a gifted baby. Just like the family that wins the Christmas light competition is the one that has the most money to spend on light up reindeer and electronic Santa’s that can wave their arm while yelling Merry Christmas. In fact, the genetically enhanced babies will find it easier to obtain success. People who are gifted either academically, physically, athletically, musically, or artistically have an edge in becoming successful in our highly competitive society. The genetically advanced babies will get the better job, buy the bigger house, and have enough money so that they can “one-up” other people when they decide to have a baby. The cycle will continue, and the rich will keep on getting richer, and the poor will keep on getting poorer.

If parents are allowed to use the reproductive genetic techniques to select the sex of baby, then countries like China and India that value boys more than girls will use the technology as a way to ensure that they get a boy. If the technology is not regulated, then who is going to stop them? It may get to the point where women are needed only for means of reproducing. Sleep, eat, sex. Women would no longer be human — but property. This is inhuman, and we must make sure that it does not happen by carelessly letting this technology be abused.

It is good to see that so many are showing concern about the possibilities of designer baby
technology. It is reassuring to know that people are not blindly accepting a technology that has the capability of producing disastrous affects on our society. Both sides of the argument are simply concerned about doing what is in the best interest for the human race. We are right to be hesitant, but after looking at both sides of the argument, it can easily be seen that with strict federal regulation reproductive genetic technology will provide miracles for millions of sick and suffering people. It is quite obvious that the world has to start addressing many of these issues and questions, and decide whether it is in the best interest of society to continue researching this highly controversial technology. In the next generation the technology will be out there, and “the potentials will arrive quickly once the technology moves forward” (Jonietz par. 5). What seems very far off may occur in the not so distant future. Preventing parents from using advanced reproductive genetic techniques for medical purposes would be preventing lives from being saved, and diseases from being cured. I for one do not want to watch another innocent child needlessly suffer through a long, painful death. A death that could have been prevented—for half the price of a new car.
Works Cited


