

# Genetic engineering ethics

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A British couple has bypassed strict laws in Britain for genetic screening by traveling to America and undergoing treatment which costs \$30,000 in order to conceive their desired child, in the hope to save their sick 4-year-old son who is recovering from Leukemia. Experts at the Reproductive Genetics Institute based in Chicago did IVF treatment on the mother and then screened embryos to find a good bone marrow match for the British couple's son, should he relapse and need a transplant.

Doctors will collect blood from the umbilical cord, which is rich in stem cells that have the ability to repopulate bone marrow. This has been a controversial case where it is questionable if science has pushed the boundaries too much. The key ethical issues explored in this case include, whether it is fair for parents to manipulate the genes of their children for particular traits when the child themselves cannot give consent, does selecting for certain traits pose health risks that would have not been apparent otherwise and will new forms of inequality arise due to genetic aristocracy.

The key ethical issue I am looking at is whether it is morally right for parents to be allowed to create designer babies, is it a step towards scientific success or the pushing of scientific boundaries? Kantian ethics was a theory developed by Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), he believed in the respect for persons, that no one should be treated as a means to an end only. As Rachel and Rachel (2010) state, the only way human beings can have a moral goodness is to act from a good will as if it is a sense of duty.

Can (2002) supports this by saying that Kant considered it a duty to treat people with respect because of their freedom and to encourage the pursuit of individual's ends because it has been their free choice. Therefore treating them as an end and never only as a means, as that is considered as manipulating and using people to get to your desires. Another important part of Kantian Ethics was the Idea of an action being applied universally.

Christians, Fickler, McKee, Crashes and Woods (2009) state " what Is right for one Is right for all" (p. 15). According to Kant he believed that before you acted you would have to question whether you would apply this action universally and allow everyone to do it as well, if so the act would be accepted and if not the act would be disallowed. Rachel and Rachel (2010) support this by saying, " being a moral agent, hen, means guiding ones conduct by universal laws - moral rules that hold without exception In all circumstances" (p. 29). Undergoing genetic engineering, it is known that Kant believed that if an action was to be Justified it should be able to be applied universally. Applying this British couples action universally would mean that it would be Justified for every family having children to genetically modify their babies genes by using embryo screening technology. In this case it would be a good outcome as it allows security for both the parents and especially the 4-year-old son who could possibly have a relapse.

However Kant would not agree to apply it universally as it would allow all couples to under go embryo screening where not only you can screen for genetic disease but also determine what gender, hair type, eye color type and height levels your child would be, there would be families who would abuse this scientific technology to create the most genetically superior child.

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Another reason why Kant would not support the actions of this British family is because he believed that you should never treat someone as a means to an end.

Kant thought it was a duty to treat people with respect because of their freedom. However in the case the designer child has given no consent in the matter in being the savior child for the older son, incase he is in need of a transplant. Instead of the parents promoting the idea of letting their newborn child have a life where the respect of its own rights are more important, it now has to live a life knowing that its own internal body parts and organs will be used incase of a relapse for the sick sibling. Consequentially this child is therefore used as a means to an end.

Although the designer child is promoting its siblings welfare and putting its own needs before its own, this child has had no freedom of hooch and the parents are solely thinking about the consequences and the positive outcomes this designer child will create. Kant would conclude that the parents of the designer baby are morally wrong and their actions weren't Justified. Utilitarianism takes a very different approach to Kantian ethics as it is essentially determined by what will produce the best consequences and increase overall happiness and the least amount of evil in the world.

There are two main types of Utilitarianism, one is Classical Utilitarianism and the other is Rule Utilitarianism. The preferences between the two are that Act Utilitarian's Judge an action based on the consequences of it, whereas Rule Utilitarian's Judge the action as a rule and what would happen if everyone lived by it. However both forms can be summarized into three

propositions. The first proposition is all actions can be judged right or wrong, dependent on their consequences.

Rachel and Rachel (2010) state that to determine whether an action is right or wrong you should look at the results and consequences of that action, if it has produced the most happiness for the greatest amount of people then therefore it is right and nothing else matters. Christians, Fickler, McKee, Crashes and Woods (2009) discuss the second proposition for utilitarianism as a calculation for the consequences of each option available and then question whether there is a greater amount of harm or greater amount of good in the lives that would be affected.

Once actions have been judged we then are morally obliged to choose the option with has the greatest amount of happiness and least amount of unhappiness. The third proposition urges that everybody happiness is stating "right actions are those that produce the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness, with each person's happiness counted as equally important" (109). Looking at this case from a Utilitarian view, it shows to have very different perspectives than Kantian Ethics.

The Utilitarianism approach supports the act of the British couple with creating a genetically modified child in the aid of their 4-year-old son, as they believe that actions should be judged on their consequences. The act of which the British couple chose to make was to genetically screen and then choose an embryo with the perfect bone marrow gene to help save their son recovering from Leukemia should he need a transplant.

The consequences of which this act has are to help save the life of the young 4-year-old child and create security for the family, knowing they would have two healthy children. Another reason why Utilitarian's will support the actions of this couple is because it has created the greatest amount of happiness. In this case the people who would be truly happy are the parents, as a sense of security has been created from the designer child and also the sick four-year-old son would be very happy as well as he gets to live a healthier life knowing he has the transplants available should he need them.

However the only person who would be unhappy could be the designer child as it is being used without giving consent but that would not matter as Utilitarian's also believe that everyone's happiness is equal, so therefore no one's happiness is more important than the others. Utilitarian's are more concerned about the consequences of an action than the motives and intentions therefore the action of the parents creating a designer child would be considered morally right as the consequences of this action leads to a greater amount of happiness than unhappiness.

From a Utilitarian perspective Parents would be considered morally right in allowing to create designer babies as it can be used to eradicate life threatening diseases that are identified in an embryo and also create a more powerful race where everyone can do what they set their mind which would lead to a greater amount of good in the lives of people. In conclusion, I have explored the ethical issues surrounding this case and whether it is morally right for parents to be allowed to create designer babies.

Through the theories of Kantian Ethics and Utilitarianism I have come to form my own opinion that designer babies are unnecessary, although they may save lives it is impossible to justify who needs the designer baby and who doesn't. Kantian Ethics would oppose the creation of designer babies because it effectively neglects an individual's freedom and is something that can't be deemed as a universal rule and Utilitarianism supports it as the consequences create the greatest amount of happiness and least amount of unhappiness for the family.