

Saviour siblings debate



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A saviour sibling is a child who is born via pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). This shows any fatal diseases in embryo screening, to find a tissue type match for the existing sibling so that stem cell transplantation can take place with the newborns umbilical cord. Many people believe that this is unethical because it doesn't consider the newborns rights, or simply because some cannot understand what parent's go through. This is often questioned because it is typically thought of as wrong and that it will lead to ' designer' babies being born and that the sibling will be treated as a commodity.

My response to this is that the arguments presented against saviour siblings are flawed, in that not allowing a saviour sibling to be created would result in deaths of many children worldwide and will therefore conclude that there is nothing unethical about it at all, rather its unethical to do the contrary. Since, would it not be unethical to fail to protect people who are able to be protected in this way, would avoiding this not mean we are posing a threat or harm to their life purposefully? In this essay I will discuss how creating a saviour sibling is ethical and parents are doing the most loving thing possible and providing the gift of life, but more importantly saving a life.

The main argument against saviour siblings being an unethical procedure is that the dismissing of PGD will result in many children's deaths, of which most could have been saved, if a saviour sibling was born. It is unethical to say that a child being brought into the world is for purpose only; it is much more than that. As Sheldon and Wilkinson point out, " You have to have a very powerful reason to resist the means by which a child's life can be saved" (p. 533). They show that saying it is unethical because of a slim possibility the child may be treated differently is highly judgmental, and is

not reason enough to dismiss the concept of saving lives. It is more unethical to not help someone who is severely ill; it would be allowing the pain to continue at your will.

Those who choose to save a life are extremely loving and ethical to consider it in the first place, as it would be heartbreaking to watch a sick child and be helpless. No-one who has not been in that position is in any place to comment on it being unethical, saviour siblings are available as a last resort to save a life and reduce suffering where possible. Modern day medicine is created and technology advanced for these sorts of purposes.

The argument defends the idea of a saviour sibling being ethical on the grounds that saving a life is always going to be better than not saving a life. That latter would be more unethical. The process involves motivation and so the parents are highly unlikely to be anything but supportive and loving throughout the process, and especially toward the new baby. Parents are faced with a hard decision of choosing ways to help their child, and when most options are exhausted saviour siblings can be the only option to severe illnesses. Overall, the circumstances surrounding them initially shows that they thought a life was worth fighting for and a saviour sibling would endure the same amount of care. It would be a strange thing to do of the parents, to then think of him/her as a purpose only since the result of saviour would oversee the so called 'means' of existing only because of an end which is needed.

In response to my argument, those who prohibit saviour siblings on ethical terms always stand by the main point that the child would be treated as a

commodity since they would be unwanted after they have served a purpose of saving a sibling. The main concern is that it is unethical since the child's welfare and rights are not taken into consideration and would be treated differently especially if the saviour sibling was to end up not saving their life. How would the parents then treat the child? Some say that they would see it as a failure, and love it less because he/she did not fulfill their sole purpose of benefiting the sibling.

This leads onto the next point, that saviour siblings are treated as a means to an end and this is extremely unethical to do so. It is wrong to create children under certain proposals for an outcome, and Kant's Dictatum points this out, " Never use people as a means, but always treat them as an ends"(Harris, p. 398). Treating the child as a means of saving a sibling, rather than an end in themselves is to create a child which is not done for a selfless reason and therefore unethical. If the child was to find out that this was why they existed, then he/she would certainly have psychological problems as they would always wonder what it's life would have been like had they not been born in this way. The problem is of course, that people do conceive children in this way, for means, since the only outcome of creating a saviour sibling is to help someone else.

However it is rightly argued against it, that in by saying a child's life would be bad is unfair, since how would anyone be able to know this? Just because they were born under circumstances, does not mean that it would be so.

There must be a valid reason for saying this, or be able to at least show why this would be true. And more to the point, how by denying a saviour sibling on ethical terms is more harmful than children dying; it couldn't be that it is

worse. As seen here, “ Psychological research studies have identified that children brought up through assisted reproduction technology have just as close a loving relationship with parents...”(Harris, p. 399). No parent would go through the pain of it just to end up treating the saviour sibling as an object, or in an unmoral way. There would be more love for him/her, and equally no reason to just treat them as an end to suffering, but rather as a blessing in itself that they have a new child to love and one which has helped their other child.

No one ever seems to question the motives of people who have children to save failing marriages, or to have a brother or sister for their current child's benefit of having someone to play with. These are surely more trivial reasons, which apparently are more acceptable than those, which save lives. It is wrong to say creating a saviour sibling to save a life is unethical but creating a child for instrumental purposes suiting the parents is ok, it only benefits the parents needs, but a saviour sibling will always benefit everyone.

Aside from the views argued, there are further implications. The main consideration is that it's unclear as to what should constitute as an unethical reason for having a saviour sibling, and who is to be judge of this. Certainly though, it can't be said that saviour siblings cause parents to pick designer characteristics such as blue eyes and brown hair, since there are regulations in place which would never allow this for this procedure. Freeman states, “... PGD was developed it was envisaged that embryos would be selected for their own intrinsic merit and not for utility to another person” (Harris, p. 391). This intrinsic merit must be to save a life and live as a healthy child,

and not to please the parents by having certain designer features to their future child.

Much thought goes into these views, and it would mean that it would be just as much of a thoughtful process for parents. It is never the case that a parent endures the process of saviour sibling creation for characteristic means or to then treat the child as a sole purpose only. There is no moral or ethical equal between a saviour sibling and producing a child for designer reasons, as that would be an insignificant purpose. It is not the done thing by good parents, it is not in their nature and they would not have considered the process had they been uncaring, unethical and non-loving. Parents are hard done by this criticism of not taking into consideration their child's welfare and all possible problems. The benefit of saving a life is always going to surpass reasons of saviour siblings being born as a commodity with no proof of how they will live; it has little substance to the question of it being unethical. I would challenge anyone to deny the views and processes a parent goes through, when their child is dying in front of them, not one reason could be more unethical than not saving a life when it is possible.