

Lesson Plan: Designer Babes

Learning goal:

- Students will consider many sides of the designer baby argument in order to support, challenge, or qualify the overarching ethical question surrounding the matter.
- Students will question assumptions that underlie epigenetics, eugenics, and general genetic manipulation

OPENING ACTIVITY

- What are some of the cutest features a pet could have, in your opinion? Write down your aesthetic, idealized pet in your philosophy journals.
- Some things to consider:
 - Are they Furry? Scaly? Fuzzy? Cuddly? Spirited? Big? Small? What if a pet could have all of these features? Would you want that pet?
 - Do you have any features you would not want to be combined in one animal?
 - A scaly creature that is cuddly might not be appealing to all.

Discussion:

- **Aborting/keeping fetuses based on traits found in genetic testing**
 - Parents able to see what traits the embryo has and decide (based on the results of the screening) whether they want to “keep” the baby or not
 - What traits do you think would be favorable? Unfavorable? And why?
 - Do you think this practice is ethical? Why or why not?
 - **Utilitarian:** Given the finite number of children a person can have, one can maximize the amount of joy brought into the world by ensuring that their child will live the best life possible.
 - Downs Syndrome: Number of children born with Downs Syndrome has plummeted in Denmark since the start of testing
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/12/the-last-children-of-down-syndrome/616928/>
- **Actively editing genes of embryo to design baby**
 - Technologies such as CRISPR may one day allow parents to literally design babies by choosing certain characteristics
 - In what situations, if any, is this morally justifiable?
 - Possible qualities
 - Athletic ability
 - Intelligence

- Personality
 - If it's permissible in certain circumstances, where ought the line to be drawn?
- **Is there a moral distinction between aborting in response to prenatal testing and actively designing?**

Thought experiment adapted from NYU Pre-College Philosophy Lesson plan:

- Imagine you/your partner are expecting and you get a genetic screening done on the embryo
- Scenario 1) The baby will have a very painful disease that will cause it to live for only 6 months. The doctor tells you about a program that can remove this gene from the embryo with no other effects/harm done. What do you do?
- Scenario 2) Same setup but with depression
- Scenario 3) Same setup but with addiction
- Ask students to explain/justify their choice
- If you had the ability to insert certain traits into your unborn child, would you? What traits would you choose? (intelligence, speed, strength, artistic skill, etc.)
- Should humans have this ability to manipulate their biology? Why or why not? When does "biohacking" go too far?

Social Injustice Implications:

- Would selection of traits have social injustice implications?
 - If Yes, in what ways? Accessibility to gene editing itself (\$), ostracization, [infanticide](#), etc.
 - If No, in what ways? One may argue that gene editing would not create new problems if these problems already exist.

Closing/Overall Feedback:

- Have students write on index cards about their experience with this after school class
- What things did they like/dislike
- What is something interesting they learned?
- If applicable: how has this course changed your outlook?