

- Explore how both image and text present a conflict of values.

Tom Purcell¹

Genetically Engineered Children

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"Sit down over here. It won't take but 20 minutes for us to custom-design your fetus."

"You want to custom-design our child, doctor?"

"In the summer of 2012, University of Washington researchers made a massive biotechnology breakthrough! Few people talked about it at the time."

"What breakthrough, doctor?"

"It involved using a blood sample from a pregnant woman and a saliva specimen from the father to map the DNA of their fetus. It took some time for the procedure to become practical and affordable, but the ability to know a child's complete DNA blueprint eventually gave parents a lot of choices."

"Choices, doctor?"

"The press reported that the procedure could allow parents to 'someday prenatally change genes seen as causing diseases or, more startling, pick a child's attributes such as eye color or even intelligence.'"

"We can now pick our child's intelligence?"

"Why not? We help parents determine the height, weight, eye color and IQ of their children, and that's just for starters."

"Why would parents want to decide all of these things?"

"No offense, but you and your wife are a bit chubby. For a price, I can take the fat gene out of your kid's genetic mix and he or she will grow up to be as skinny as a rail."

"But being chubby isn't the end of the world. Winston Churchill³ was chubby. Orson Welles⁴ was. Our parents were. These people did well in life."

"If you say so. But we'll have to do something about your noses. You and your wife have some big honkers. We have a range of celebrity noses you can choose from in our catalog. It will save you a fortune!"



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“How will custom-designing our child’s nose save money?”

“We charge a lot less to fix the nose at the gene stage than a plastic surgeon will charge after the baby is grown. Of course, we can avoid your and your wife’s obvious imperfections by shopping for a better embryo.”

40 “Use someone else’s genes to make our baby?”

“It’s all the rage! We have a catalog of good-looking Ivy League⁵ students who donate their eggs and other genetic specimens for money. We mix and match these parts to create embryos, which we then implant into any mother who can afford our fee.”

“Don’t you feel that you are trifling with nature, doctor?”

45 “We’re simply picking up where nature left off. We’re simply refining the baby-making process.”

“Perhaps there may be value in correcting medical issues in our child before he or she is born, but this is all so new. We really want to think it through.”

“Look, when people try to have kids the old way, all kinds of things can go wrong. Some couples might have a child that has Down syndrome⁶. We prevent such errors from occurring in the lab.”

50 “But, doctor, any parent of a Down syndrome child will tell you that such children are cheerful, loving and blessings from God.”

“Whatever. We also eliminate all other imperfections, such as blindness and deafness.”

“But Helen Keller⁷ was blind and deaf and she did remarkable things. Look, doctor, advances in science are a good thing, but my wife and I really want to think this through. Do we really want

55 the power to manipulate the genetic makeup of our children?”

“Hey, most parents want intelligent children who are as attractive as a supermodel. What is wrong with that?”

“But if everyone is as beautiful as a supermodel, won’t beauty lose some of its meaning, doctor? If parents can custom-create the life of their child, won’t life itself lose some of its meaning?”

60 “Meaning? What’s all this silly talk about meaning?”

Daryl Cagle’s The Cagle Post: Cartoons and Commentary, www.cagle.com, August 21 2012

¹ Tom Purcell: freelance writer and humour columnist for the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, syndicated by Cagle Cartoons, authored the article “Genetically Engineered Children”

² Taylor Jones: freelance cartoonist syndicated by Cagle Cartoons, artist of the “Evolution” cartoon

³ Winston Churchill (1874–1965): British prime minister, statesman and orator

⁴ Orson Welles (1915–1985): American actor, film director and producer

⁵ Ivy League: eight private and well respected universities in the US

⁶ Down syndrome: genetic condition causing birth defects

⁷ Helen Keller (1880–1968): deafblind person who became a leading 20th century activist and humanitarian