

# Eagle Forum Report

*successor to The Phyllis Schlafly Report*

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## *The Future of Family is Now*

### HACKING THE SOFTWARE OF LIFE

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**P**eople should be squeamish about the revolution in biotechnology. Yes, we wonder at the possibilities for curing genetic diseases and even for making ourselves smarter, prettier, or stronger. Yet we shrink from the potential horror of the world we might create with no hope of turning back.

Is this just the next step in human discovery about ourselves, or does it mean the end of humanity as we know it? Could we literally redesign humanity out of existence? Some are telling us that indeed we can and we will and it is inevitable and “you’d just better get used to it.”

Who’s right? What have we done already? Is there any opportunity for science and society to agree?

#### Is There a Posthuman Future?

“Transhumanists” are among those who welcome with open arms the possibilities of genetic engineering to alter who and what we are. They scoff at the reluctance of others to step into this coming Brave New World. They relish the possibilities of double and triple average life-expectancy, designer babies, and the elimination of genetic disease. They aren’t troubled by the necessity of costly mistakes and failures. That’s just the

price of research and progress. We accept risk all the time, they say. Why should genetic research be any different? They apply rather consistently a naturalistic worldview which sees human beings as just another species. We certainly are not made in the image of God, they say, so why is our current genetic structure sacred?

Gregory Stock opened his book, *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future*, with: “We know that *homo sapiens* is not the final word in primate evolution, but few have grasped that we are on the cusp of profound biological change, poised to transcend our current form and character to destinations of new imagination.” Stock is a naturalist and has little patience with those who would hold back our genetic future.

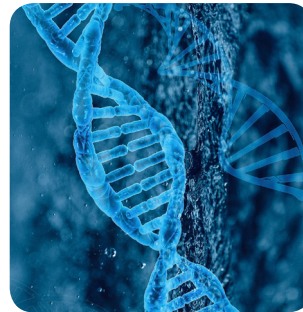
Stock rightly points out that we have already started down the road of genetic manipulation of our species. Several fertility clinics in the U.S. already offer preimplantation genetic diagnosis or PGD. This procedure screens newly created embryos by in vitro fertilization for a few genetic

diseases such as Tay Sachs, cystic fibrosis, and hemophilia. You can also have the embryos screened for sex selection.

One couple from Wyoming had fourteen embryos created by in vitro. Seven were male, seven were female. They chose three females to be implanted to ensure their fourth child was a girl after three boys. The technique is virtually 100% effective. Less efficient sperm selection techniques are only 91% effective for girls and only 76% effective for boys. But should we be selecting the sex of our children?

Over one million IVF babies have been born worldwide, around 28,000 in the U.S. — roughly 1% of newborns. This may soon become the “natural” way once more procedures become available to design our own babies. We may recoil today at the thought of designer babies, but we also recoiled 45 years ago against the thought of test-tube babies.

Stock closes his book by saying, “We are beginning an extraordinary adventure that we cannot avoid, because, judging from our past, whether we like it or not this *is* the human destiny.” But is it?



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## What's Wrong With DNA Tinkering?

Couples are already being given the power to choose the sex of their child, even at the cost of simply rejecting the embryos that are the wrong sex. But our technology is advancing rapidly to allow a far broader array of genetic choices.

Gene therapy, the ability to transfer a normal human gene into the affected tissues of a person affected by a single gene disease, has been pursued for over ten years. So far results have been disappointing. That is partly the reason why many are looking for improved ways to add genes to the earliest one-cell-stage embryo so the gene can be spread to all tissues at once. This process is also rather inefficient in animals, successful only about 1% of the time.

Some researchers view the embryo fourteen days after conception as little more than reproductive cells and not yet worthy of being declared human. With this definition, embryos can be wasted as long as a supply of human eggs is readily available.

Researchers have already devised artificial chromosomes. These chromosomes pass on stably over several generations in mice. They have been tested successfully in human tissue culture, and have remained stable over dozens of cell divisions. No one has added foreign genes to these chromosomes, but that is the plan: to provide a safe and effective means of adding genes to embryos and have them distributed to all tissues and to succeeding generations.

Stock summed it up when he said, “Breakthroughs in the matrixlike arrays called DNA chips, which may soon read thirty thousand genes at a pop; in artificial chromosomes, which now divide as stably as their naturally occurring cousins; and in bioinformatics, the use of computer-driven methodologies to decipher our genomes

— all are paving the way to human genetic engineering and the beginnings of human biological design.”

Some may scoff at these projections, but people seem quite willing around the world to consider taking advantage of technologies that can genetically enhance themselves or their offspring. So what's the problem?

## Improving the Original Design?

I believe that being able to genetically redesign human beings is far closer than most people realize. Not only is the technology developing at an ever-increasing rate, but people are also far more willing to consider using such technologies. I have deep reservations about this seemingly inevitable future.

I believe that at least trying to alter ourselves genetically is inevitable because the technology is developing rapidly using animal models. And whatever we have done in animals, we eventually do in humans. The naturalistic worldview says quite strongly that we are just another animal species. If our understanding of our own genetics continues to increase and we gain the technology to correct our defects and faults, the naturalist says, Why not?!

Society and governments have put few barriers in the way of scientists and researchers from simply taking the next logical step. So far, we have been unwilling to say that there are some experiments we will not do. Even though most will say they are against human cloning — even scientists — that figure is changing, and we have few reasons for our objections besides the fact that it is not yet safe. If it does become safer, the public will have little room to say no.

As to genetic engineering, we are easily swayed by appeals to eliminate genetic diseases without considering how difficult it is to delineate between curing genetic disease and producing genetic enhancements. Nobel

Laureate James Watson, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, exposes our difficulty with two penetrating statements. Concerning curing genetic disease he said, “What the public wants is not to be sick and if we help them not to be sick, they'll be on our side.” In another context Watson said, “No one really has the guts to say it, but if we could make better human beings by knowing how to add genes, why shouldn't we?”

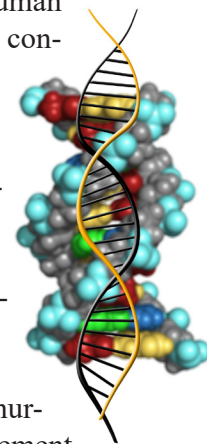
Only a few voices are warning of the developing crisis over human dignity as the diesel engine of human genetic technology gains momentum and steam. Some fear that we must figure out how we are going to cope with a future of redesigned humans.

Leon Kass's book, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity* acknowledges that there is a human design.

Kass sees that our efforts to redesign humans challenge our very dignity and identity as human beings. If parents have constructed the best child for them using the best available technology they can afford, are they still parents, or creators and owners with additional rights and privileges? A child becomes a commodity to be designed, manufactured, and even sold. Love and nurture will turn to management and stimulation.

Within a few short decades, our children will be pressured to alter their children genetically to keep up with society. Scientific research may well use human embryos as research subjects. This research may likely extend to developing fetuses, and it will all in the name of furthering health and eliminating disease.

Do we really think we can improve on the original design? We must take seriously this threat to our humanity. 



# CREATING BROKEN FAMILIES

by Kristina Twitty, MA (Bioethics) Founder, DecisionCareAdvocates.com. Eagle Forum Bioethics Issue Chair.

**W**ho ever imagined that we would live in a world where selling babies would be acceptable and encouraged as an altruistic good? Of course, they are not exactly babies yet, but without these hot commodities, babies would be impossible. What are those commodities? Human sperm and eggs of course. They go for high dollar and the smarter, prettier and more accomplished the young man or woman selling them, the more expensive it is to obtain them. So, let us look at what it takes to “make a baby” using the advancement of medical technology.

The first “test tube baby” literally conceived “in glass”, was born July 25, 1978. Her name is Louise Joy Brown. In-vitro fertilization was developed by embryologist Robert Edwards and obstetrician/gynecologist Patrick Steptoe. In 2010 Edwards won a Nobel Prize for his work. By then, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, four million children had been born from IVF worldwide and seemed to be just as healthy as children conceived naturally. (Subsequently, there have been other studies raising concerns for the potential health risks to children and also as older adults due to having been conceived this way.) There was concern and controversy, especially from the Catholic church, who issued a reprimand to Edwards. Edwards replied, “I wanted to find out exactly who was in charge, whether it was God Himself or whether it was scientists in the laboratory... [I learned] it was us.”

Assisted Reproductive Technology is technology to assist reproduction. It “includes all fertility treatments in which either eggs or em-

bryos are handled.” The main type of ART is IVF. This involves extracting a woman’s eggs, fertilizing the eggs with sperm in a laboratory, and then transferring the resulting embryos into the woman’s uterus through the cervix. Due to the extraordinary cost of the process and the toll taken on those involved, most procedures result in the creation of far more embryos than are likely to be implanted in the womb. To have the “best chance” of a live birth, testing for genetic defects with Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis is expected, and often leads to the discarding of any “defective embryos.” Embryos can be selected (or rejected) based on their sex. IVF now represents 99 percent of the ART procedures in the U.S.

In order to obtain eggs for IVF, a woman is given hormones through pills and injections to cause her to over produce multiple eggs (instead of one or two as in a normal cycle). Her eggs, typically a dozen or more, are surgically extracted from the ovary, using a long needle inserted through the cervix and into the bulging, hyper-stimulated ovaries. Once extracted, the eggs are placed in a petri dish with sperm which have already been washed and sorted for fertilization to take place and after a few days of incubation, inserted back into the uterus. If the embryo attaches to the lining of the uterus, it is called implantation. The CDC reports that 1.7 percent of all infants born in the U.S. are conceived using ART. However, only a third of couples undergo-

ing infertility treatment with IVF take home a baby.

## Egg and Sperm “Donation”

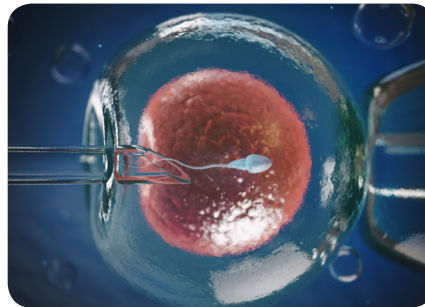
When a woman’s eggs are unusable, from age or disease, egg “donation” is the go-to solution. Instead of the intended mother undergoing weeks of hormone treatments and surgical egg extraction, a younger woman is paid for “donating” her eggs and undergoing the process. In a much easier process, men donate their sperm to address male infertility or the desire of single women to “conceive on her own.” Still, rife with ethical dilemmas, young men are often handed porn to encourage a “donation” and the number of offspring are often unknown to him — ever.

Jennifer Lahl, founder of the Center for Bioethics and Culture Network has produced multiple documentaries about sperm and egg donation, as well as the impact on the children produced through this process.

“Anonymous Father’s Day” explores the impact of sperm donors (especially their absence) on their offspring. “Eggsplotation” follows women who “donated” their eggs from altruistic or cash-strapped positions, with sometimes devastating and fatal results. Lahl insisted that the major problems with egg donation are:

- coercion of “donors”;
- eugenic commodification of egg providers;
- health risks to suppliers and recipients;
- effects of third party reproduction on the children produced.

Just a few side effects of egg donation include: hypotension (low



(Continued on page 4)

blood pressure), insomnia, depression, constant gnawing bone/joint pain), osteopenia, fibromyalgia, autoimmune diseases, and cancer. Eggs or embryos were donated in about 12 percent of all ART cycles in the U.S. in 2010, but the number of pregnancies using donor insemination are not tracked by the CDC.

In her book *Confessions of a Serial Egg Donor*, thriller author and Swedish beauty, Julia Derek tells her story of donating eggs to put herself through University of California Berkeley, recruiting another donor (who committed suicide) and nearly committing suicide after her eleventh of twelve “donations.” Though she had been catered to throughout her “donations,” she did not receive the support she had expected when things started getting complicated and her body began to shut down.

Money becomes manipulation in these cases. Derek desperately needed money for school and there are wealthy people who will pay a high price for eggs (and sperm) with the desired characteristics. When young women wait for the “perfect time” or better careers for themselves or their husbands, they are more willing to do “whatever it takes” to have a baby. When company insurance coverage makes it practically free, what is to stop them? Companies now advertise “open donations” to make it sound less like child-trafficking. This arrangement expects the “egg donor” (i.e. biological mother) to see and know the child, born to other parents, but biologically related to her.

To liken this to adoption, as some do, could not be further from the truth. Adoption offers a solution to an unsupported, unexpected, unplanned child — a loving choice to redeem a broken family. Buying eggs and sperm *intentionally* and *deliberately* separates children from their medical history, their biological mother or father, siblings, aunts, uncles,

grandparents, and cousins, creating a broken family from the beginning. Egg “donation” uses a woman for her body. She is paid for her services and yet the transaction is called an “altruistic donation.” If young women are not paid, rarely do they put themselves through the pain of donating their own eggs to create offspring for someone else.

### Making Children Into Commodities

Matt Doran and his sister Katy are rumored to be two of 500 plus offspring of “Kip.” Matt learned the story of his conception when he was 25 years old and about to have his first child. After two years of searching, he found his “bio-dad” and he now helps others to find their genetic family through DonorChildren.com. When Matt was asked what he thought about the use of “donor” gametes and he said he wished it were not legal.

When “Donor Children” learn of their origin, not only does it set them on a journey to find their mother (or father), but due to the anonymity of the egg and sperm donation process, each grown man must eventually ask “Are you my sister?” Each donor-conceived woman will need to ask “Are you my brother?”

Adult children are often devastated by news of their conception, sometimes hidden for decades as was the case for the Emmons sisters. Dr. Paul Brennan Jones (age 80) of Grand Junction, Colorado assisted at least 10 women to conceive children between 1976 and 1997. He told his patients he was using fresh sperm from near-by donors, which now appears to be his own. Dr. Jones refused to answer questions or offer a DNA sample, telling a reporter he did not “want any incriminating evidence against him.” Learning that she (and

her sister) are not related to her father of nearly 40 years was “devastating” and “turned our world upside down” she said. Through Ancestry.com and 23andme.com, the Emmons sisters found eight other half-siblings.

When singles or same-sex couples determine to “have a child of one’s own”, they have decided for that child that he or she does not need a mother or a father. Plenty of studies describe the impact of mothers and fathers, intact families and the success of children who grow up in them. No matter how hard our culture

tries to erase the differences between men and women or even eliminate terms as mother and father, biology still matters. Procreating in this way is a form of child-trafficking. It is

certainly cruel to these children, their future spouses and children who lose out on the family members they many never know. Katy Faust grew up in one such home and now through her organization, Them Before Us, she advocates for children to have the rights to a mother and a father ahead of the desire of any adult to produce a manufactured child.

When you can “buy” something, it becomes a commodity. When you pay someone an enormous amount of money which they desperately need, it easily becomes manipulation. We must not use another body to make children to call our own, but welcome them as gifts. 



### EAGLE FORUM

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