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Sliding Fast Down the Slippery Slope

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Just days after reporting that 90 percent of all babies diagnosed with Down syndrome are now aborted, Amy Harmon reports in *The New York Times* that the real reach of the question goes far beyond Down syndrome. Now, some babies are aborted for virtually any trait considered undesirable by the mother or parents — and ethicists seem unwilling to draw any clear lines.

As Harmon reports:

Abortion rights supporters — who believe that a woman has the right to make decisions about her own body — have had to grapple with the reality that the right to choose may well be used selectively to abort fetuses deemed genetically undesirable. And many are finding that, while they support a woman's right to have an abortion if she does not want to have a baby, they are less comfortable when abortion is used by women who don't want to have a particular baby.

"How much choice do you really want to give?" asked Arthur Caplan, chairman of the department of medical ethics at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. "That's the challenge of prenatal testing to pro-choicers."

We knew this was coming, and the expanding availability of genetic testing will make the situation ever more complex and the options even more ominous. What about those who would abort a baby of the wrong sex . . . or eye color . . . or likely intelligence?

Here is a frightening section of the paper's report:

But Kirsten Moore, president of the pro-choice Reproductive Health Technologies Project, said that when members of her staff recently discussed whether to recommend that any prenatal tests be banned, they found it impossible to draw a line — even at sex selection, which almost all found morally repugnant. "We all had our own zones of discomfort but still couldn't quite bring ourselves to say, 'Here's the line, firm and clear' because that is the core of the pro-choice philosophy," she said. "You can never make that decision for someone else."

There is a brutal honesty in Kirsten Moore's candid admission that her inability to rule out *any* reason for an abortion is inherent in her pro-choice philosophy.

That same point is made by Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America. She provided the paper with a statement that included these lines:

"This issue underscores the importance of families making personal, private decisions without political interference . . . The decision should be with women, their families, and their doctors."

As Amy Harmon reports, there are a good many people who consider themselves pro-choice who cannot go along with this logic. Ann Althouse, a law professor who considers herself a supporter of abortion rights, asked the key question: "Shouldn't they have moral standards about what reasons are acceptable for an abortion?"

The answer coming from groups like NARAL is a simple "no." And they apparently mean it.

Professor Althouse should talk to Dan Neil, whose argument for unrestricted abortion rights sends chills down the spine.

Neil's column, "[The Abortion Debate Brought Home](#)," was published in the May 6, 2007 edition of *The Los Angeles Times*.

Here is how he begins:

My wife and I just had an abortion. Two, actually. We walked into a doctor's office in downtown Los Angeles with four thriving fetuses — two girls and two boys — and walked out an hour later with just the girls, whom we will name, if we're lucky enough to keep them, Rosalind and Vivian. Rosalind is my mother's name.

We didn't want to. We didn't mean to. We didn't do anything wrong, which is to say, we did everything right. Four years ago, when Tina and I set out on this journey to have children, such a circumstance was unimaginable. And yet there I was, holding her hand, watching the ultrasound as a needle with potassium chloride found its mark, stopping the heart of one male fetus, then the other, hidden in my wife's suffering belly.

Neil and his wife aborted two boy fetuses in order to increase the chances for two healthy girls. All of this resulted from an IVF procedure and the option of "selective reduction" that is urged upon parents by many doctors.

As Neil explains, "We don't feel guilty. We don't feel ashamed. We're not even really sad, because terminating these fetuses — at 15 weeks' gestation — was a medical imperative."

That is a redefinition of "imperative," and the claim completely side-steps the moral responsibility of using a technology that is almost certain to present this awful choice. Furthermore, Neil and his wife used advanced diagnostic testing to determine which fetuses to abort.

Added to all this, Tom Storde of [Baptist Press](#) reports that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in Britain has allowed human embryos to be tested for eye squint. As Storde explains, "The news marked an ominous milestone — supposedly the first embryo screening for a cosmetic flaw."

More:

The director of the London Bridge Fertility, Gynaecology and Genetics Centre, which gained the license from the HFEA, told BBC News it was more than a cosmetic condition.

"Whereas we all know somebody who's got a squint, in this particular condition the muscles that control the gaze of direction of the eyes [are] grossly abnormal, so the gaze of the eye might be 90 degrees different from the direction which one might be looking, so to speak, the direction of one's face," Gedis Grudzinskas said.

Grudzinskas is not opposed to using PGD for cosmetic reasons, however.

"We will increasingly see the use of embryo screening for severe cosmetic conditions," he said, according to The Telegraph, a British online newspaper.

The clinic director said he would be willing to try for permission to test for any genetic factor that would produce severe distress in a family.

When asked about hair color, Grudzinskas said, "If there is a cosmetic aspect to an individual case I would assess it on its merits. [Hair color] can be a cause of bullying which can lead to suicide. With the agreement of the HFEA, I would do it.

There is no honest way to deny the slippery slope toward the wholesale denial of human dignity. We are frighteningly far down that slope already.

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