Cultural Daily

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The Future Frontiers of Childbirth

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, June 19th, 2019

Having a child in the U.S. isn't nearly as easy as it might seem. Complications during birth result in an alarming number of fatalities for expecting mothers, a problem which disproportionately affects women of color. Additionally, there are more esoteric issues regarding motherhood. Will your child be healthy and happy in the future, even if you do everything possible to make that happen? If there were a way to guarantee that your baby grew up to be strong and intelligent or a way to ensure that the health risks of pregnancy could be completely avoided, would you make those decisions regardless of cost?

The Rise of Surrogacy

There is an unfortunate level of discrimination that pregnant women and mothers face in the workforce. Women who are pregnant have a harder time finding employment, whether it is as a Hollywood actor, CEO, or even doing menial labor because employers see pregnant women as incapable of completing all of the tasks that a non-pregnant woman would be able to do. Regardless of circumstances, in the future, women may have even more options to completely forego carrying their babies inside their own bodies than they have today.

Surrogacy isn't exactly uncommon in today's society, though the majority of women who choose to find a surrogate to carry their child to term usually do so out of medical necessity. Surrogacy requires a significant financial commitment as well as a serious level of trust between an expectant mother and the surrogate who has opted to carry the child for them. However, while this method has worked for quite some time, the future holds the promise of completely reducing the health risks of childbirth for all women, no surrogate necessary.

Artificial wombs are already in existence and have been used to successfully keep premature lambs alive outside the mother's womb. While the current idea for these artificial wombs is to use them to help premature human infants at least 22 weeks old reach mature gestation, the future holds endless possibilities. One day, it could very well be possible to grow a human from a blastula all the way to full term inside one of these artificial wombs, completely eradicating the need for natural childbirth, if that is what the mother wants.

Designer Babies

Modern America seems to be obsessed with the concept of biohacking, a way to enhance human abilities and brainpower. However, the idea of a pill that can unlock the hidden potential within your brain is solidly grounded in the realm of fiction. While the field of nootropic drugs is gaining

traction among those looking to enhance the power of their own mind, science has already found a way to permanently increase a human's brain power, though the origins are less than ethical.

By now most people have heard of the recent story of two genetically altered twins created by a Chinese scientist with dubious morals named He Jiankui. While the goal of this ethically unsound experiment was to engineer a human who is resistant to HIV, when the Chinese team deleted the CCR5 gene from their genetic code, they may very well have improved their cognitive function and ability to learn from memories. The method that Jiankui used in order to delete this specific gene is called CRISPR, and the implications of CRISPR technology are far-reaching.

CRISPR gene editing, if ever found to be ethically viable, will allow parents to pick and choose every aspect of their child's physical and mental capabilities. By combining gene editing with cutting edge cloning techniques, scientists could even potentially give people who never found a partner a chance to be a parent to an improved version of themselves. The ethical and moral dilemmas involved with genetically engineering disease-resistant, hyper-intelligent, and physically-advantaged human beings put the likelihood of this becoming the norm within our lifetimes as a distant possibility.

Children Will Become Very Expensive

New parents can often experience their love turn into a more transactional, business-like relationship. These new parents find themselves divvying up tasks, discussing bills, and overall struggling to maintain passion in their relationship due to the financial and time commitments it takes to raise a child. While the future might make childbirth easier and even the children themselves better, it certainly won't make it any less expensive or time-consuming.

When someone makes the decision to become a parent, they are essentially locked into at least an 18-year contract that obligates them emotionally and financially responsible for the little human they create. Budgeting for expectant parents is already a massive undertaking, as they have to work in the cost of all the monthly expenses a new child incurs, up to $2,000, on top of their existing budget. In the future, the scientific frontier of childbirth isn't going to make that budgeting any easier.

Assuming a child costs a maximum of $2,000 a month for 18 years, that is a whopping $432,000 before a parent is technically no longer required to financially support a child. Currently, cloning a dog can cost up to $100,000, and if human gene editing and cloning ever become publicly available, it is safe to assume that the costs will be much higher than that of cloning a Boston Terrier.

While the future is bright for new methods of childbirth from surrogates to artificial wombs, cloning, and gene editing, for now, these are all very far off. Even if and when these become viable options, the cost associated with them will likely be astronomical, both monetarily and ethically. For now, the best bet is to tough it out naturally and hope for the best.

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