

Would you want to select your future child's gender?

A bioethics expert has argued that parents should be allowed to use selective reproduction to choose their future child's gender and to screen out serious disease and disability.

Professor Stephen Wilkinson, of the Centre for Professional Ethics at Keele University in Staffordshire, argues that unless there is a serious sex imbalance in the population (e.g. many more boys than girls) or the decision is motivated by sexist attitudes or beliefs, parents should be allowed to decide the sex of a future child.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 prohibits sex selection of offspring for non-medical reasons.

In his new book, *Choosing Tomorrow's Children: The Ethics of Selective Reproduction*, Professor Wilkinson also suggests that prospective parents should be offered all the available tests to avoid disease or disabilities that cause premature death or serious pain.

Professor Wilkinson said: "Parents often put a lot of effort into influencing how their children will grow up, encouraging some characteristics and discouraging others. But what if parents, or the State, set about trying to influence the future population's characteristics, not by influencing existing children, but by choosing between different possible future children? This is already happening to some extent and it is important to explore the moral dimensions of this."

The book also asks what differences there are between what has historically been termed 'eugenics' and contemporary uses of biotechnology to select healthy embryos, and examines the ethical distinction between improving health and other forms of 'enhancement'.

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