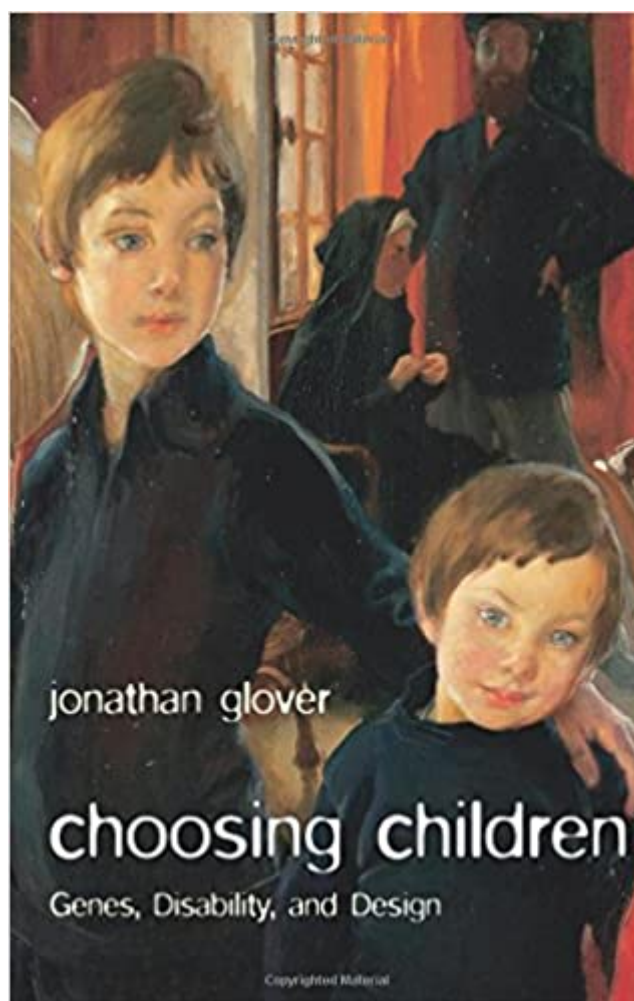


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# Choosing Children: Genes, Disability, And Design (Uehiro Series In Practical Ethics)



## Synopsis

Progress in genetic and reproductive technology now offers us the possibility of choosing what kinds of children we do and don't have. Should we welcome this power, or should we fear its implications? There is no ethical question more urgent than this: we may be at a turning-point in the history of humanity. The renowned moral philosopher and best-selling author Jonathan Glover shows us how we might try to answer this question, and other provoking and disturbing questions to which it leads. Surely parents owe it to their children to give them the best life they can? Increasingly we are able to reduce the number of babies born with disabilities and disorders. But there is a powerful new challenge to conventional thinking about the desirability of doing so: this comes from the voices of those who have these conditions. They call into question the very definition of disability. How do we justify trying to avoid bringing people like them into being? In 2002 a deaf couple used sperm donated by a friend with hereditary deafness to have a deaf baby: they took the view that deafness is not a disability, but a difference. Starting with the issues raised by this case, Jonathan Glover examines the emotive idea of "eugenics", and the ethics of attempting to enhance people, for non-medical reasons, by means of genetic choices. Should parents be free, not only to have children free from disabilities, but to choose, for instance, the colour of their eyes or hair? This is no longer a distant prospect, but an existing power which we cannot wish away. What impact will such interventions have, both on the individuals concerned and on society as a whole? Should we try to make general improvements to the genetic make-up of human beings? Is there a central core of human nature with which we must not interfere? This beautifully clear book is written for anyone who cares about the rights and wrongs of parents' choices for their children, anyone who is concerned about our human future. Glover handles these uncomfortable questions in a controversial but always humane and sympathetic manner.

## Book Information

Series: Uehiro Series in Practical Ethics

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; Reprint edition (February 25, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199238499

ISBN-13: 978-0199238491

Product Dimensions: 7.8 x 0.3 x 5.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #612,660 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #37 in [Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Reproductive Medicine & Technology](#) #85 in [Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Reproductive Medicine & Technology](#) #98 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Genetic](#)

## Customer Reviews

Review from previous edition "This short, readable book outlines with exemplary clarity the philosophical terms of the issue."Bryan Appleyard, Sunday Times`delightfully readable, insightful essays...Glover writes with enormous authority....a thoughtful and superbly written book`BBC Focus`Packed into Glover's little book is a lot of common sense....elegant summaries...fascinating themes'Madeline Bunting, Guardian Review

Jonathan Glover is Professor of Ethics at King's College, University of London, and the Director of the Center for Medical Law and Ethics. He is the author of *Causing Death and Saving Lives: The Moral Problems of Abortion, Infanticide, Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, War, and Other Life-or-Death Choices* and *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, among other books.

This short work of three chapters explores the implications of genetic science on the possibilities of designing our children to specifications. It covers the practical possibilities and the attendant moral decisions that apply to our decisions. Much of the discourse on this subject involves the question of what counts as "disabilities" and to what extent are we justified in producing children without them? Delving deeper, Glover asks the fundamental question, "To what do we owe our children?" On the surface, some decisions appear straightforward. If we know beforehand that our child is likely to be born with Down's syndrome, or blind, or deaf, should we not prevent the birth of that child? In answering "yes", are we not transferring our own perception of what happiness and enjoyment of life mean to us to that of the unborn child? Many have criticized the deaf lesbian couple who obtained the sperms of a male donor that ensured that their child was born deaf. The couple disputes the suggestion that being deaf was a disability. Many examples - blindness, etc were given and discussed. Glover also discusses the competing rights of parents and their children. The right of choice we give parents exposes the problem of what rights we ought to recognize in the children. It makes us wonder what rights are, and whether there are different levels of rights, entrenched rights,

and inalienable rights, and who decides. It forces us to contemplate the diversity of human emotions and psychology that makes for true humanity. Human identity surely must allow for such diversity. Atheists, for example, may mount irrefutable rational arguments against the assertions of the existence of god; but would we be right to deny people the right to believe if that belief makes them happy and keeps them comforted? Ought we to apply the Kantian principle that people must not be used as a means? If so, can we justify having a second child so that we can use its bone marrow to save our first child from a fatal bone marrow disease? This is a profound book but short and extremely lucid. It points the way, and the reader may not agree with the author's own inclinations, but he must surely think for himself what grounds he has for choosing a different path.

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