Orchid babies: Is this embryo scanning fertility startup furthering eugenics or ‘protecting future people from future suffering?’

God help the babies! Or, absent God, a fertility startup called Orchid. It offers prospective parents a fantastical choice: Have a regular baby or have an Orchid baby. A regular baby might grow up and get cancer. Or be born with a severe intellectual disability. Or go blind. Or become obese. A regular baby might not even make it to childbirth. Any of those things could still happen to an Orchid baby, yes, but the risk, says 29-year-old Noor Siddiqui, plummets if you choose her method. It’s often called “genetic enhancement.”

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Which is, of course, the entirety of Siddiqui’s pitch: to—based on what the science says—protect future people from future suffering. It’s why, as a teenage Thiel Fellow, Siddiqui launched a medical startup; and why, at 25, she started Orchid. It’s also why, now that the company’s gene-enhancing product is available, she wanted to be one of its first customers.

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Right now, Orchid calculates each embryo’s likelihood of one day suffering from any number of the more than 1,200 diseases and conditions about which we currently have (anywhere from rock-solid to, ya know, vague and extrapolative) genetic information. Who knows what it will calculate in the future.

Orchid is still in its early days—16 employees, $12 million in funding. But already they’re in 40 IVF clinics across the country and have thousands of customers.

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