

# Topics in Bioethics: Creating Persons

NYU Bioethics BIOE-GA 1008  
Spring 2015 – Mondays 6:45-8:45  
Bobst LL 147

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This seminar will examine conceptual and ethical issues arising from the ways in which we are able to create and recreate human persons. We will start with the most obvious sort of person-creation: biological reproduction and the selection of future people. We will then consider childhood development and the roles of education and enculturation in shaping the values that constitute personal identity. And we will consider how social practices and emerging biotechnologies allow us to recreate ourselves and others throughout the human lifespan. Our focus will be on the tension between moral respect for autonomy and the extraordinary power to (re)create autonomous persons.

## I. Creating human beings

### 1. Should we create new humans?

26 January

What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting

L. A. Paul (2015). *Res Philosophica* 92(2): 1-23.

The Gift of Life

J. David Velleman (2008). Part II of 'Persons in Prospect'. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36 (3): 245-266.

### 2. Identity, non-identity, and creation

2 February

Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil

Robert Merrihew Adams (1979). *Nous* 13(1): 53-65.

How to Solve the Non-Identity Problem

David Boonin (2008). *Public Affairs Quarterly* 22(2): 127-157.

### **3. Selecting children**

**9 February**

Parental Choice and What We Owe to Our Children

Jonathan Glover (2006). Chapter 2 of his *Choosing Children: Genes, Disability, and Design* (New York: Oxford University Press): 37-72.

Where is the Sin in Synecdoche? Prenatal Testing and the Parent-Child Relationship

Adrienne Asch and David Wasserman (2005). In *Quality of Life and Human Difference: Genetic Testing, Health Care, and Disability*, ed. D Wasserman, J Bickenbach, and R Wachbroit. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 172-216.

**(16 February - no class - NYU closed for Presidents Day)**

### **4. Objections to selecting children**

**23 February**

Nativity, the Capacity of Being Oneself, and the Ban on Instrumentalization +  
The Moral Limits of Eugenics

Jürgen Habermas (2003). Chapters 5 and 6 of his *The Future of Human Nature* (Malden MA: Polity Press): 53 - 66.

Designer Children, Designing Parents + Mastery and Gift

Michael J. Sandel (2007). Chapters 3 and 5 from his *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press): 45-62; 85-100.

## **II. Creating human persons**

### **5. Children as emerging persons**

**2 March**

The Child's Right to an Open Future

Joel Feinberg (1980). Reprinted in his *Freedom and Fulfillment: Philosophical Essays* (1992, Princeton: Princeton University Press): 76-97.

The Child's Right to an Open Future?

Claudia Mills (2003). *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34(4): 499-509.

Training: A Work of Conscience?

Sara Ruddick (1989). Chapter 5 of her *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press): 103-126.

## **6. Childhood and the creation of the moral self**

### **9 March**

What Is a Child?

Tamar Schapiro (1999). *Ethics* 109 (4): 715-738.

Piagetian Autonomy

Regina A. Rini - unpublished manuscript

**(16 March - no class - NYU closed for spring holiday)**

## **7. Education and Emergent Persons**

### **23 March**

The Nature of Freedom + The Meaning of Purpose

John Dewey (1938). In his *Experience and Education* (New York: Kappa Delta Phi): 61-72.

The Authority to Educate

Kenneth Henley (1979). In *Having Children: Philosophical and Legal Reflections on Parenthood*, ed. O O'Neill and W Ruddick (New York: Oxford University Press): 254-264.

*Zhuangzi, Xunzi, and the Paradoxical Nature of Education*

Chris Fraser (2006). *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33 (4): 529-542.

Educating for Authenticity: The Paradox of Moral Education Revisited

Stefaan E. Cuypers (2009). In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. H Siegel (New York: Oxford University Press): 122-144.

## **8. Persons and Cultural Identity**

### **30 March**

The Demands of Identity

Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005). Chapter 3 of his *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 62-114.

Minds of Their Own: Choices, Autonomy, Cultural Practices, and Other Women

Uma Narayan (2002). In *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. LM Antony and CE Witt (Boulder: Westview Press): 418-432.

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### **III. Persons and social (re)creation**

#### **9. Persons, selves, values**

**6 April**

Identification and Externality

Harry Frankfurt (1976). Reprinted as chapter 5 of his *The Importance of What We Care About* (1998, New York: Cambridge University Press): 58-68.

Sour Grapes – Utilitarianism and the Genesis of Wants

Jon Elster (1989). In *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*, ed. J Christman (New York: Oxford University Press): 170-188.

On Psychological Oppression

Sandra Lee Bartky (1979). Reprinted in her *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990, New York: Routledge): 22-32.

#### **10. Identity maintenance and social relations**

**13 April**

Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem

Trudy Govier (1993). *Hypatia* 8(1): 99-120.

Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting

Kate Abramson (2014). *Philosophical Perspectives* 28: 1-30.

#### **11. Manipulation, autonomy, and consent**

**20 April**

Valuing Autonomy and Respecting Persons: Manipulation, Seduction, and the Basis of Moral Constraints

Sarah Buss (2005). *Ethics* 115: 195-235.

Persuasive Advertising, Autonomy, and the Creation of Desire

Roger Crisp (1987). *Journal of Business Ethics* 6: 413-418.

Habits, Nudges, and Consent

Ezio Di Nucci (2013). *American Journal of Bioethics* 13 (6): 27-29.

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## **IV. Persons and medical (re)creation**

### **12. Moral personality and psychological alteration**

**27 April**

Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility

Susan Wolf (1988). In *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*, ed. John Christman (New York: Oxford University Press): 137-154.

Moral Enhancement Via Direct Emotion Manipulation: A Reply to John Harris

Thomas Douglas (2013). *Bioethics* 27 (3): 160-168.

Moral Bioenhancement: Much Ado About Nothing?

Inmaculada de Melo-Martin and Arleen Salles (forthcoming). *Bioethics* doi:10.1111/bioe.12100

### **13. Authenticity and control over recreative technologies**

**4 May**

The Woody Allen Puzzle: How 'Authentic Alienation' Complicates Autonomy

Suzy Killmister (forthcoming). *Nous* doi: 10.1111/nous.12069

Enhancing Authenticity

Neil Levy (2011). *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28 (3): 308-318.

Authenticity or Autonomy? When Deep Brain Stimulation Causes a Dilemma

Felicitas Kraemer (2013). *Journal of Medical Ethics* 39: 757-760.

### **14. Recreative technology and responsibility for the self**

**11 May**

Responsibility for Self

Charles Taylor (1976). In *The Identities of Persons*, ed. AO Rorty (University of California Press): 281-299.

Treating Yourself as an Object: Self-Objectification and the Ethical Dimension of Antidepressant Use

Ginger A. Hoffman (2013). *Neuroethics* 6: 165-178.

Self-Knowledge and the Minimal Conditions of Responsibility: A Traffic-Participation View on Human (Moral) Agency

Maureen Sie (2014). *Journal of Value Inquiry* 48: 271-291.

## **Assessment**

Students taking the course for credit will be graded according to the following distribution:

10% participation

15% weekly questions

75% term paper

### **Participation**

As this is a small class, every enrolled student is expected to regularly participate in class discussion. Your participation grade is based upon reliable attendance and engagement in class. If you experience any barriers to speaking in a seminar, please inform me early in the term and we will make alternate arrangements for evaluation of your participation.

### **Weekly questions**

Starting from week 2, every enrolled student must submit questions about the week's readings on our NYU Classes Forum. Please write 2-4 questions. These may be clarificatory ("I didn't understand what the author meant by this sentence:...") or they may be argumentative ("I didn't find the author's claim X convincing; I wonder how she would respond to the following objection:..."). The aim here is to generate topics for discussion in class. Questions must be submitted at least 24 hours before class. They will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and each student is permitted one free pass (one week in which you do not need to submit questions, to use whenever you wish). You are highly encouraged to read and reply to other students' questions.

### **Term Paper**

Enrolled students will write a seminar paper on any topic discussed during the term. The target length is 4,000-6,000 words. Papers submitted late will incur a 1/3 letter grade penalty each day. You must submit components per the following schedule; these will not be individually graded, but failure to submit required components will lower your final paper grade.

### **Schedule for paper components**

23 March (Mon) – submit **one sentence** describing your topic

6 April (Mon) – submit a prototype **thesis paragraph**

27 April (Mon) – submit a full paper **outline**, max length 1 page

2 May (Fri) – OPTIONAL deadline to submit a paper draft

16 May (Fri) – Final due date for complete paper

You may change your topic at any time until Friday 9 May, one week before the final deadline. If you do so, you must send me a thesis paragraph and outline for your new topic.