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

The Gift of Life

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

Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil

How to Solve the Non-Identity Problem
3. Selecting children
9 February

Parental Choice and What We Owe to Our Children

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

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

4. Objections to selecting children
23 February

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

Designer Children, Designing Parents + Mastery and Gift

II. Creating human persons

5. Children as emerging persons
2 March

The Child’s Right to an Open Future

The Child’s Right to an Open Future?

Training: A Work of Conscience?
6. Childhood and the creation of the moral self
9 March

What Is a Child?

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Regina A. Rini – unpublished manuscript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

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

Educating for Authenticity: The Paradox of Moral Education Revisited

8. Persons and Cultural Identity
30 March

The Demands of Identity

Minds of Their Own: Choices, Autonomy, Cultural Practices, and Other Women
III. Persons and social (re)creation

9. Persons, selves, values
6 April

Identification and Externality

Sour Grapes – Utilitarianism and the Genesis of Wants

On Psychological Oppression

10. Identity maintenance and social relations
13 April

Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem

Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting

11. Manipulation, autonomy, and consent
20 April

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

Persuasive Advertising, Autonomy, and the Creation of Desire

Habits, Nudges, and Consent
IV. Persons and medical (re)creation

12. Moral personality and psychological alteration
27 April

Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility

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

Moral Bioenhancement: Much Ado About Nothing?

13. Authenticity and control over recreative technologies
4 May

The Woody Allen Puzzle: How ‘Authentic Alienation’ Complicates Autonomy

Enhancing Authenticity

Authenticity or Autonomy? When Deep Brain Stimulation Causes a Dilemma

14. Recreative technology and responsibility for the self
11 May

Responsibility for Self

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

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