

# Week 1 Reading - What is Morality?

## **The Benefits Argument**

1. If we can benefit someone, without harming anyone else, we ought to do so.
2. Transplanting the organs would benefit the other children without harming Baby Theresa.
3. Therefore, we ought to transplant the organs.

## **The Argument that We Should not Use People as Means**

1. It is wrong to use people as means to other people's ends.
2. Using people involves violating their autonomy - their ability to decide for themselves according to their own values and desires.
3. Force people against their will.
4. Theresa, for example, was not an autonomous being, she has no wishes and is unable to make decisions for herself, so others must do it for them.

## **The Argument for the Wrongness of Killing**

- Argues that what makes killing wrong, when it is wrong, is not that it ends life, but that it causes complete and irreversible disability - what they call total disability.
- It is not that it causes harm, but that it is intended to do so, or that it violates a right which protects against harm.
- Killing someone might be wrong because it deprives that person of future valuable opportunities or experiences.
- Right to autonomy.

## **The Argument that we should Save as many as we can**

- If we can act so as to save more lives rather than fewer, we ought to do so.

## **The Argument for the Sanctity of Human Life**

- It is wrong to take innocent human life.
- All human life is precious, regardless of age, race, social class, or handicap.
- The prohibition against killing innocent humans is absolute.

## **The Argument for the Wrongness of Discriminating against the Handicapped**

- It is wrong to discriminate against the handicapped
- Handicapped people should be given the same respect and the same rights as everyone else.

## **The Slippery Slope Argument**

- If pardoning certain actions and scenarios as ethically acceptable, we will end up taking the same attitude toward the lives of other handicapped people, and perhaps even other classes of people as well.
- If we accept any sort of mercy killing, we will slide down a slippery slope, and in the end all life will be held cheap. Where will we draw the line?

### **Reason and Impartiality**

- A core that every moral theory should accept at least as a starting point.
- Moral judgements must be backed by good intentions.
- Morality requires the impartial consideration of each individual's interests.
- Conduct is guided by reason: we should do what we have the best reasons for doing.

### **Moral Reasoning**

- We cannot rely on our feelings, no matter how powerful they might be.
- Our feelings may be irrational and may be nothing but products of prejudice, selfishness, or cultural conditioning.
- Our decisions must be guided as much as possible by reason.
- The morally right thing to do is always the thing best supported by the arguments.

### **The Requirement of Impartiality**

- Impartiality: the interests of all those affected should be taken into consideration.
- The morally right thing to do, in any circumstance, is whatever there is the best reason for doing.
- Moral judgments must be backed by good reasons.
- Impartial consideration of each individual's interests; proscription against arbitrary evaluations.
- Each individual's interests are equally important, and no one should get special treatment.
- If there is no good reason for treating people differently, then discrimination is unacceptably arbitrary.

# Readings Summary

## **JAMES RACHELS**

### **MORALITY:**

- Defined by an individual's beliefs through interaction with the social world.
- The principles concerning the distinction between what one may essentially deem as correct or incorrect behaviour.
- Though note what classifies as a morally right act is highly subjective based upon individuals.
- Morality is based on reason it is not a matter of feelings or personal taste (James Rachel's morality reasoning).
- Often defined as how a person ought to act associated with principles concerning right and wrong and ethical behaviour.

## **ROSALIND HURSTHOUSE**

- Maintains all individuals retain central ethical virtues that remain natural to the species.
- Every virtue of character yields a positive rule of action and every vice or defect of character yields a negative rule.
- Virtue ethics rests on the stimulus behind ones actions and thus the a virtuous reason will equal virtuous outcome.
- Act in the way a fully virtuous human being acts for the reasons that the fully virtuous human being acts on.
- Emphasis on moral motivation.

## **DEONTOLOGY — KANT**

- Normative ethical position that judges the morality of an action based on rules. It is sometimes described as "duty-" or "obligation-" or "rule-" based ethics.
- An approach to Ethics that focuses on the rightness or wrongness of actions themselves, as opposed to the rightness or wrongness of the consequences of those actions (Consequentialism) or to the character and habits of the actor (Virtue Ethics).
- Avoids subjectivity and uncertainty because you only have to follow set rules.
- It also means disregarding the possible consequences of our actions when determining what is right and what is wrong.
- Rule based ethics about some things we should simply never engage in.
- Applies the idea of impartiality.
- There are some things we should never do (regardless of the consequences) we should never kill (even in self-defence or in protection of others).
- Morality involves absolute moral prohibitions. Kant: must never lie (even to prevent a murder Jewish in holocaust example)

## **RICHARD LEWONTIN — HGP**

- Concerns of genetic determinism.
- Such importance placed on genetics reflects the subscription to genetic determinism.
- Hence, it is unethical.
- Against human genome project discriminatory slipper slope where does it stop.

## **DANIEL KEVLES — HGP**

- Eugenics is ethically acceptable as a means to improve the social population.
- Believed nature vs nurture is a false belief.
- For one cannot outweigh the other as individuals are a bi product of both.

### Nature VS Nurture

- Nature refers to all of the genes and hereditary factors that influence who we are—from our physical appearance to our personality characteristics.
- Nurture refers to all the environmental variables that impact who we are, including our early childhood experiences, how we were raised

### Nature vs Nurture Argument

- Do genetic or environmental factors have a greater influence on your behaviour? Do inherited traits or life experiences play a greater role in shaping your personality?
- In the case of human genome the concept immediately assumes nature shapes the individuals hence must be manipulated in order to generate 'better humans'
- **Negative eugenics: prevent** someone from procreating (e.g. forced sterilization, making IVF ridiculously expensive, etc.) less production of undesirable traits
- **Positive eugenics: promoting** the reproduction of those with desirable traits (e.g. paying Nobel laureates for their gametes) more production of desirable traits

## **KITCHER — PGD**

- Genetic tests to identify those at risk of developing a disease might offer a quite different type of benefit. Even in those cases in which nothing can be done to avoid the disease, greater knowledge can bring greater autonomy.
- Can we build a social context in which genetic tests realise their potential to enhance human lives?

### **Argument:**

- Should be a right to genetic privacy.
- Genetic underclass of "asymptomatic ill" hierarchy based on genetic purity due to lack of privacy of genetic information.
- Knowing what we are at most basic levels through DNA – induces individuals to higher forms of discrimination and prejudices.
- What will be left unknown this information can be used for bad purposes.
- Majority of society (unless they have been tested) do not know the statistical, medical facts of predispositions.
- The long term repercussions of accessing such genetic information are unknown hence it should be protected.
- Those who test false positive to diseases —> suffer stigmatisation and potential abortion etc.
- Luck egalitarianism equal distribution of resources and opportunities, not just wealth.
- **Circumstances over which people have no control should not adversely affect life prospects;** traits such as sex or race are elements over which people have no control and, hence, should not be the basis of distributing goods, opportunities, etc.

## **DEBORAH KAPLAN — AGAINST PGD**

- Parental screening is concerned with the existence or avoidance of disability in society and individuals however is this consistent with those if the disability rights movement their life is equally as valuable as a fully independent functioning individual.

- Purpose of screening is to prevent disabilities through abortion prevention of disease through dietary change prevention of family disruption through adequate preparation.
- PGD remains unethical in nature as the very act of it assumes genetic determinism and hence discrimination

### **JULIAN SAVULESCU — FOR ENHANCEMENT (PROCREATIVE BENEFICENCE)**

- Enhancement is not just morally permitted, it's morally obligatory.
- Should be permitted by law - but not required by law.
- Julian Savulescu coined the phrase procreative beneficence.
- It is the controversial putative moral obligation of parents in a position to select their children, for instance through preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), to favour those expected to have the best life.
- Some non-disease genes affect the likely hood of us leading the best life.
- We have a reason to use information which is available about such genes in our reproductive decision-making.
- Couples should select embryos or foetuses which are most likely to have the best life, based on available genetic information, including information about non-disease genes. I will also argue that we should allow selection for non-disease genes even if this maintains or increases social inequality.
- Selecting genes for intelligence and sex selection is ethical and valid.
- Savulescu endorses Procreative Beneficence maintaining it is justified.

Procreative Beneficence: referring reproducers selecting the child who is expected to have the best life or as good a life as the others, based on the relevant, available information.

#### **Pro Enhancement (Essentially Savulescu's reasoning)**

- Now used to select against disease
- Could be used to select for (or against) non-medical traits – Wouldn't involve killing of foetus (which might have some/more moral status)?
- Less invasive (e.g., for mother) than abortion.
- Would have less psychological costs than abortion.
- Though if couples choose a child with a chance of having a lower quality of life they should be free to do so- however we remain morally obliged to choose the potential higher performing child recognises that it may compromise equality for a 'great' purpose.

### **MICHAEL SANDEL — AGAINST ENHANCEMENT (CASE AGAINST PERFECTIONISM)**

- Creating the perfect child and selecting certain genes in order to develop a highly successful, performing child is inherently problematic.
- It threatens to banish our appreciation of life as a gift, and to leave us with nothing to affirm or behold outside our own will.
- The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements.
- "To acknowledge the giftedness of life is to recognise that our talents and powers are not wholly our own doing, despite the effort we expend to develop and to exercise them. It is also to