

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
Spring 2009

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Third Paper Topic

Choose one of the following questions to answer. Type out the question you are answering at the top of your paper. Your paper is due in class in SES #19.

- (1) Consider two claims that a moderate advocate of eugenics might make:
- A: We should discourage people with certain genetic disabilities from reproducing.
 - B: We should encourage parents to terminate fetuses that have genetic diseases, such as thalassemia (assume, for the sake of this exercise, that abortion is not controversial).

Pick one of these claims and construct the best *slippery slope argument* that you can against it. Every slippery slope argument describes a series of claims or policies, the last of which we clearly should not accept or follow. Be sure to describe your series in detail. In light of the history of the eugenics movement in America (claim A), or the thalassemia prevention program in Cyprus (claim B), how plausible or implausible is your argument? Did slippery slope fears come true? Is society today more or less vulnerable to slippery slopes than in the past?

- (2) With advances in medical knowledge and technology, prospective parents have come to worry about subtler and subtler risks during pregnancy. At the same time, they are offered an expanding set of recommendations on how they might optimize their offspring. What historical changes have contributed to these changing perceptions? At present, most people consider it ethical to intervene during a pregnancy to reduce harm to a fetus, but there is less consensus about whether it is ethical to intervene to enhance the capabilities of a fetus. What motivates this distinction? As perceptions of risk and technological capabilities continue to improve, is it likely that enhancement will become more acceptable, the kind of future that Rifkin describes?
- (3) Suppose I deliberately bring an unhealthy child into the world, when I could have instead brought a healthy child into the world. Suppose nobody but my child is affected by this. Have I done anything wrong? You may be inclined to think I have, but Derek Parfit argues that this gives rise to a problem -- the "non-identity problem." What is the problem? What is his solution? Is it the best solution?

General Guidelines:

Your papers should be 4-6 pages, double-spaced. Grading will be based on how well you answer the question, specifically your argument, use of evidence and readings, organization, and clarity. Give proper credit with citations whenever you use material (quoted or summarized) from readings or lectures; if you have questions about this, see the information at the MIT Writing Center website (<http://web.mit.edu/writing/>).