SIMONA CORSO
University of Rome "Roma Tre"

FLORIAN MUSSGNUG
University College London

VIRGINIA SANCHINI
University of Milan; IEO IRCCS, Milan; KU Leuven

INTRODUCTION
IMAGINING HUMAN REPRODUCTION

Phenomenology and Mind, n. 19 - 2020, pp. 10-18
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17454/pam-1901
Web:http://www.rosenbergesellier.it/elenco-libri?aaidriv=14

ISSN 2280-7853 (print) - ISSN 2239-4028 (on line)

Questions about human reproduction and parental responsibility run through our lives. They shape our experience as natal and mortal beings and orient our thinking about generation: the process by which we come to be; the activity in which we engage or choose not to engage as procreative beings; our syncopated sense of time; our responsibility for the continuity of human life on a finite and vulnerable planet. Like all living species, humans tend to reproduce. For this reason, assumptions about procreation and parenthood have long provided a powerful means to imagine the future. In *Evolution and Ethics: Prolegomena* (1894), philosopher and biologist Thomas Henry Huxley envisaged an inexorable rise in human numbers: "Man shares with the rest of the living world the mighty instinct of reproduction and its consequences, the tendency to multiply with great rapidity" (Gilbert and Pinto-Correia 2017: 200). More than a dozen decades later, debates about population control, public health and migration still rest on this assumption. Population growth, along with improvements in nutrition, public health and life expectancy, forms the backdrop to advances in assisted reproductive technology, reflections on ethics and values, and a re-assessment of what it means to procreate. In this context, discussions about parental responsibility touch on urgent questions. If the human world population continues to grow in the way that it has, future humans may be condemned to vastly inferior lives. Other species will also suffer the consequences of globalisation and human population growth. But can and should we seek to reduce the number of human births? Practices of family planning and population control – at least as old as Plato's *Republic* – raise deep-seated fears. Since the dawn of the modern age, struggles over population have led to the establishment of coercive regimes, whose brutal interventions have perpetuated and increased inequalities and injustice between and within nations (Connelly 2008). The history of nineteenth-century eugenics – the idea of improving the genetic makeup of humankind – casts a dark shadow on practices of family planning and on advances in medically assisted reproduction. Neo-Malthusians, eugenicists, pro-natalists and nativists disagree in their political visions, but share a deterministic view of procreation, and a desire to control how people breed.

The articles in this special issue offer a different perspective on this complex tangle of questions and challenges. *Human Reproduction and Parental Responsibility* brings together leading scholars and early career researchers from a wide range of disciplines: political and moral philosophy, literary and cultural studies, bioethics, legal philosophy, the medical humanities, and gender and sexuality studies. Individual contributions highlight the diversity between disciplines, moral and political orientations, but agree on a shared set of assumptions and

concerns. Against the ethical and methodological strictures of naive biological reductivism, we call for attention to philosophical inquiry and cultural narratives. We do not treat human reproduction as a biological given, but argue that a carefully reasoned case for the permissibility and desirability of procreation can and must be made. At the same time, we are averse to coercive policies and mechanisms of population control that violate individual reproductive lives and futures. Finally, and most importantly, we object to what we perceive as a widespread tendency to discuss reproductive rights exclusively in relation to technological possibility, and affirm the importance of cross-disciplinary dialogue. The articles in this special issue wish to foreground the vital contribution that the humanities can make to this dialogue.
Human Reproduction and Parental Responsibility explores changing social attitudes around parenting and reproductive health through a variety of ethical, legal and cultural lenses. From the Biblical God's exhortation to be fertile and multiply (*Genesis*, 1.28) to governmental demographic policies, human reproduction has always been subject to multiple pressures. Some influential thinkers have argued that human bodies are merely survival machines for "selfish genes", which ache to be perpetuated into the next generation. The long history of debates about human reproduction, however, appears to suggest the contrary: generation is not only a biological process, but also a social, cultural and ethical practice. Since the turn of the millennium, assisted human reproduction has come into view as an increasingly important field of inquiry, across disciplines. Advances in reproductive technology have profoundly altered the demarcations of parenthood. They challenge conventional perspectives on parental rights and responsibilities and call for in-depth philosophical, bioethical and legal reflection. In this context, the differences between academic disciplines and knowledge practices appear less important than their synergies. Philosophical and bioethical debate can shed light on the complex and changing emotions and experiences of parenting. Similarly, literature and film can draw attention to global patterns of exploitation and inequality, and bring into focus the discrepancies between political, philosophical and religious perspectives. The contributors to this special issue are aware that human procreation and parental responsibility are not only important, dynamic sites of transdisciplinary inquiry, but also the object of fierce political controversy. *Human Reproduction and Parental Responsibility* does not wish to settle these disputes, just like we do not seek to close the gap between nature and history. Rather, our special issue wants to advance a complex and nuanced understanding of reproductive choice that cannot be reduced to simple binaries. Many of the contributions that follow approach ethics as a body of rules and as an applied discipline. They discuss responsibility in terms of the accountability of free agents and develop philosophical orientations that guide a responsible engagement with human reproduction. Other interventions problematize this approach and indicate the need for a wider reflection on the meaning of responsibility. They explore the differences between cultural traditions on a planetary scale, de-centre the notion of the human subject as a free agent, and re-think procreation in terms of a duty of care. Again, it is not our wish, as editors, to resolve the differences between these perspectives. Rather, we have sought to showcase the productive diversity across critical interventions that collectively hold the power to break new ground, set the terms of future debate, and inspire cross-disciplinary dialogue.
This special issue is divided into three cross-disciplinary sections: Cultural Representations, Philosophical Orientations, Ethics in Context. The **first** section, **Cultural Representations**, hosts articles by Roberto Mordacci, Simona Corso, Charlotte Ross and Maria Russo. They explore how literature and film have engaged with human reproduction and parental responsibility, from 1516 to the present, and how storytelling interrogates social and cultural norms and contributes to their transformation and development.
In *Reproductive Utopias and Dystopias: More, Campanella, Bacon and Huxley,* Roberto Mordacci

offers a genealogy of the modern reproductive imagination, from Thomas More to Tommaso Campanella and from Francis Bacon to Aldous Huxley. Mordacci argues that More's *Utopia* advocates a liberal idea of the family, where divorce is allowed and relationships are free. By contrast, Campanella's *The City of the Sun* understands reproductive relationships in terms of a eugenic policy and Bacon's *New Atlantis* similarly conceives of generation as a public good. Finally, Huxley's *Brave New World* imagines human reproduction as a totalitarian nightmare. Mordacci's contribution explains how Twentieth Century writers and commentators came to view population control in a sinister light, due to its association with scientific experiment and coercive policies. He argues that this shift in cultural practices and social attitudes may be described as a transition from utopia to dystopia.

In *Birth: Stories from Contemporary Literature and Film*, Simona Corso discusses a selection of contemporary novels and films in English and Italian, which narrate experiences with reproductive medicine, from in vitro fertilization to gamete donation and surrogacy. Corso's examples include *The Kids Are All Right* by American director Lisa Cholodenko, *Google Baby* by Israeli director Zippi Brand Frank, *Venuto al mondo* by Italian director Sergio Castellitto, *Carissimi* by Italian novelist Letizia Muratori, *Non mi vendere, mamma!* by Italian author Barbara Alberti, and *Katherine Carlyle* by British novelist Rupert Thomson. Corso explores how medical practices and family histories are represented in these texts and argues that narrative can help us navigate the troubled waters of our present. While literature and film do not provide definitive answers to the many dilemmas created by advanced technologies of assisted reproductive medicine, they can at least help us formulate new questions.

Charlotte Ross' contribution, *Surviving Melancholy and Mourning: A Queer Politics of Damage in Italian Literary Representations of Same-Sex Parenting*, continues this examination of family narratives. Ross analyses the representation of lesbian and gay parents and their children in the novels of Italian writers Cristiana Alicata, Melania Mazzucco and Chiara Francini. Drawing on Judith Butler's work on mourning and melancholia and on the theoretical framework developed by gender theorist Heather Love, Ross problematizes the persistent spectre of grief that has been evoked in many narratives of gay and lesbian parenting. Her article resists homosexual doom and calls for new experiences of queer vitality that hold the power to subvert and disrupt normative conceptions of the family, in art and life. She argues that such experiences may open up spaces for creative reflection and that they can inspire innovative modes of parenting.

In *Is It Progress or Dystopia? Attitudes Toward Genetic Engineering in Contemporary Film* Maria Russo discusses how film, and especially science fiction, have tackled the theme of genetic engineering and its ethical implications. Russo begins her inquiry with a thematic overview of cultural representations of human gene editing in popular science fiction. She then offers a close reading of Andrew Niccol's film *Gattaca*. Using the critical methodologies and categories of philosopher Thomas Wartenberg, Russo argues that *Gattaca* is both a critique of genetic determinism and a philosophical thought experiment, which illustrates the pitfalls of a society where parents are free to decide the genetic makeup of their children.

The **second** section – **Philosophical Orientations** – hosts contributions by Carmen Dell'Aversano and Florian Mussgnug, Simone Pollo, Lucia Galvagni, and Sergio Filippo Magni. These articles reflect on the ethical and political obligations and dilemmas that may arise from human reproduction and from parental choices: individual and communal duties of care, personal and collective responsibilities for human and non-human wellbeing on a warming planet, reproductive justice. The authors in this section evoke a variety of disciplinary traditions and write with different urgencies, but agree on the need for nuanced ethical frameworks that can guide our thinking about vulnerability, entanglement, and the desirability of human procreation, especially in the context of assisted reproductive technology.

In *Parenthood, Climate Justice and the Ethics of Care: Notes Towards a Queer Analysis,* Carmen Dell'Aversano and Florian Mussgnug explore the concepts of parenthood, reproduction and care in the context of the unfolding global environmental crisis. Arguing from the perspectives of queer theory, literary studies and climate justice, the authors call for new strategies and attitudes towards procreation, beyond the strictures of colonizing frames of knowledge and hegemonic cultural practices. More specifically, Dell'Aversano and Mussgnug seek to move the debate around assisted reproductive technologies in new, speculative directions that are centred on shared vulnerability and kinship, and which remain fully attentive to human and non-human relations and shared responsibilities on a warming planet.

In *A Twenty-First Century Reproductive Bioethics*, Simone Pollo claims that so-called "new reproductive technologies" (NRTs) are no longer properly new. In many parts of the world, they form an integral part of modern life and an important vector of human wellbeing. They allow people to have families that would not otherwise exist. Pollo argues that discussions in bioethics must advance to account for this "new normal" and that disciplinary protocols may require considerable review. NRTs should not be treated as "new frontiers" but ought to be viewed as everyday matters. A properly contemporary reproductive bioethics, Pollo contends, needs to centre on improving universal access to NRTs and should not focus on discussions about their permissibility.

Lucia Galvagni's contribution, *New Motherhood? Embodiment and Relationships in the Assisted Reproductive Technology*, debates the practice of "maternity for others", better known as "surrogacy". As Galvagni notes, this practice, and the struggles to control it, are interconnected transnational phenomena that extend on a global scale. They engage and affect couples, communities, women who lend themselves to being "carrier mothers", and their children, and thereby raise complex moral questions about global justice and the appropriateness and legitimacy of recourse to surrogacy. Galvagni discusses the political and social contexts in which modern surrogacy develops, and reflects on processes of commercialization, corporeity and relationships. She calls for a collective and open-ended debate about new forms of motherhood, and parenting in general.

In *Person-Affecting Procreative Beneficence*, Sergio Filippo Magni comments and develops the work of philosopher and bioethicist Julian Savulescu. More specifically, Magni's contribution engages Savulescu's Principle of Procreative Beneficence, which states that couples (or single reproducers) should select the child, of the possible children they could have, who is expected to have the best life, or at least as good a life as the others, based on the relevant, available information. Magni proposes a person-affecting version of this principle, which was originally stated by Savulescu in an impersonal form, balanced with a person-affecting principle of harm. He discusses and positions both versions of the Principle of Procreative Beneficence in the wider context of ongoing debates about the legitimacy of selection.

The **third** section – **Ethics in Context** – hosts articles by Laura Palazzani, Virginia Sanchini, Davide Disalvatore, Sarah Songhorian, Paolo Spada, Pier Paolo Di Fiore, Federico Pennestrì and Davide Battisti. The articles in this third section address the question of ethical choice from the perspective of bioethics and biolaw. They consider how advances in these disciplines can inform decisions about human reproduction and how research findings and discussions have reflected and transformed notions of parental responsibility and agency.

In *Reproductive Technologies and the Global Bioethics Debate: A Philosophical Analysis of the Report on ART and Parenthood of the International Bioethics Committee of Unesco*, Laura Palazzani discusses some bioethical and biolegal issues that arise from the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ART). Palazzani's contribution specifically centres on reproductive rights and the rights of children. She examines recent advances in ART and calls for a pluralistic debate on parenthood and filiation. In her article, Palazzani exemplifies the importance of such a

debate through her analysis and discussion of the Unesco International Bioethics Committee's Report on ART and parenthood: the first global document of this kind.

Deliberation and Public Bioethics: A Test Case in Reproductive Genetics by Virginia Sanchini, Davide Disalvatore, Sarah Songhorian, Paolo Spada and Pier Paolo Di Fiore studies the theory and practice of deliberative public bioethics. The five authors shed light on the figure of the bioethical expert and investigate how deliberation may be implemented in public bioethics. They describe the findings of a large-scale experiment which investigates whether, and to what extent, different moderation styles impact on moral preferences. The authors find that different moderation styles can significantly influence deliberative outcomes. Their work also shows that the effects of deliberation are not necessarily immediate, but may only become apparent after the end of a deliberative session. Finally, they explain how participants appreciate bioethical experts as "passive moderators", namely as someone who acts in order to ensure non-domination.

In *Is Therapeutic Germline Editing Value-Based Healthcare? An Early Health Technology Assessment*, Federico Pennestrì asks why so many innovative healthcare technologies raise ethical concerns that prevent their implementation. He points out that widespread opposition is often inspired by fears of unexpected or undesirable outcomes. Pennestrì recommends that researchers analyse potential benefits and drawbacks from a multidisciplinary perspective, and that they pay attention to biomedical, social and economic factors. He presents value-based healthcare as the appropriate and comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluative framework. Pennestrì also performs a Health Technology Assessment of germline editing technologies and estimates their impact on patients and society. In this context, he comments on the recent, controversial debate which followed the germline gene editing of human embryos.

In *Genetic Enhancement and the Child's Right to an Open Future*, Davide Battisti discusses the ethical implications of genetic enhancement within the specific framework of the "child's right to an open future" argument (CROF). While it is generally assumed that CROF justifies genetic modifications that would eradicate disease or disability, disagreement exists over genetic enhancement. Battisti argues that parents do not have the moral obligation to open as many options as possible for their children. Rather, they should provide them with a reasonable range of opportunities. On this basis, he suggests that CROF is not in contrast with every form of genetic enhancement and that it may in fact entail a moral obligation to enhance progeny, under specific circumstances. Battisti clarifies this idea by referring to philosopher Allen Buchanan's definition of the 'dominant cooperative framework'.

In addition to these articles, the present special issue of *Human Reproduction and Parental Responsibility* also contains two **free contributions** by Ali Yousefi Heris and Piero Mattei-Gentili, which are hosted in the **fourth** section. These texts were submitted directly to the journal and underwent peer review independently from the preparations for the special issue. Yousefi Heris explores the role of simulational mindreading in pragmatic interpretation. Mattei-Gentili addresses ongoing debates about the ontology of norms and considers the case of accounting for customary norms. The two articles bear no specific relation to the theme of the special issue.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some articles in this special issue are developed from papers that were presented in April 2018, on the occasion of an interdisciplinary conference: "Reproductive Health and Parental Responsibility". This conference was hosted by the Department of Modern Languages at Roma Tre University, in collaboration with University College London's Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the UCL Global Engagement Office and the EGA Institute for Women's Health. Additional articles were commissioned to widen the cross-disciplinary scope of

the special issue. We are grateful to all contributors, who have responded enthusiastically to our invitation to re-think human reproduction and parental responsibility, beyond disciplinary divides. Our thanks go to the colleagues who took part in the conference as speakers and chairs: Rachel Bowlby, Martina Caruso, Simona Corso, Carmen Dell'Aversano, Giorgio de Marchis, Roberto Mordacci, Florian Mussgnug, Helen O'Neill, Laura Palazzani, Zoe Papadopoulou, Iolanda Plescia, Aarathi Prasad, James Wilson. We thank our sponsor, the UCL Cities Partnerships Programme in Rome, for financial support and the Roma Tre University for logistic and technical assistance.
The editors of the special issue are very grateful to Roberta De Monticelli, editor-in-chief of *Phenomenology and Mind*, for her generous encouragement and for her inspiring and illuminating comments. The journal's managing director, Francesca Forlé, has been a cherished source of support and advice throughout the editorial process. Our special thanks go to Aarathi Prasad, for her precious help with the linguistic and thematic revision of several articles. This revision was made possible by a grant that was generously provided by the International Research Centre for European Culture and Politics (IRCECP) of the Faculty of Philosophy of Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, Milan.

REFERENCES

Connelly, Matthew, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2008);
Gilbert, Scott and Clara Pinto-Correia, *Fear, Wonder and Science in the New Age of Reproductive Biotechnology*, foreword by Donna J. Haraway (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).