

CHV 308 / PHI 308  
Perfecting Life:  
Designing Children, Designing Memories, Designing Death  
Fall 2008  
Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30-3:20pm  
Robertson 001

PROFESSOR

Elizabeth Harman  
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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:40-4:20pm

ASSISTANTS IN INSTRUCTION

Corinne Gartner  
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Office: 1879 Hall, Room 115  
Office Hours: Thursdays 3:30-4:30pm

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:30-2:30pm

PRECEPTS

Wednesdays 3:30-4:20pm, 1879 Hall Room 123, Joshua Wilburn  
Thursdays 1:30-2:20pm, 5 Ivy Lane Room 106, Corinne Gartner  
Thursdays 2:30-3:20pm, 5 Ivy Lane Room 106, Corinne Gartner  
Fridays 10:00-10:50am, 1879 Hall Room 123, Elizabeth Harman  
Fridays 1:30-2:20pm, 1879 Hall Room 123, Joshua Wilburn

Please log on to the course's Blackboard site and record your precept preferences right away.

COURSE TOPIC

We now have unprecedented control over how we are born, live, and die. We will soon have even more control. What limits should there be on the exercise of this control?

Parents can now choose to have a girl or a boy, a deaf or a hearing child. Soon they will be able to choose to have a smarter, more athletic, taller, more beautiful child. What kind

of world are we creating if we allow parents to exercise such extreme control in designing their children? Will the unenhanced be outcasts? Will we lose out on important human variation? Will parents who choose not to enhance (or who cannot afford to enhance) be criticised? Should they be?

New drugs enable trauma victims to dampen the memories of painful experiences. In the future, other drugs may allow us to select which of our experiences we remember most vividly, or at all. Is this an unacceptable tampering with the self? Is destroying a memory just like creating a false one? Few of us would choose to give ourselves many false memories, even of great experiences. When is memory tampering a reasonable therapy, and when does the deception involved reduce the value of one's life?

Killing someone can be a way to release them from suffering, or a way to definitely end a life that seems already to be over. But which killings can be justified in this way? If someone signed a living will and is now in a permanent vegetative state, many would say it is permissible to kill them. But what about 80-year-old Ann, who used to say that she'd prefer to die than live day to day with no long term memory? Now that she has no long term memory, she still enjoys simple activities such as baking cookies. Given her current satisfaction, should we ignore her prior preferences? There are even harder cases. Should we kill an infant born with a disease that will cause tremendous long-term pain? What if its life would also involve some real happiness?

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- 10% Class Participation, homework, and debates
- 10% Two Argument Analyses (each is 2-3 pages)
- 50% Two Papers (one six pages; one eight pages)
- 30% Final Exam

An "F" on an argument analysis, on a paper, on the final exam or for class participation will result in an "F" in the course.

(There is no midterm exam)

Readings: All assigned readings are mandatory and should be completed before the lecture at which they are to be discussed. Often the readings are short but you may have to read them more than once to understand them and to be able to participate in discussion. All readings will be available on Blackboard or on the web. You are required to *print out* all readings and *bring them* to the lectures and precepts at which they will be discussed.

Attendance at both lectures and precepts is mandatory. If you know you need to miss lecture or precept, please email your precept leader before class. If you unexpectedly have to miss class, please email after class. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to find out from another student what happened and to get copies of notes and handouts. After doing that, if you have questions about what was covered, please do meet with one

of us to discuss them. Some material will only be covered in class, and you will be responsible for that material on your papers, exam and quizzes.

Although this is a large class, *everyone* will be expected to participate in discussion during lectures *regularly*.

Precepts are small so everyone is expected to speak during each meeting of a precept.

Films: If you absolutely cannot attend one of the scheduled film viewings, then please watch the film at least one day in advance of the scheduled viewing day at the Language Resource Center. See <http://www.princeton.edu/lrc> for hours.

There will be two in-class debates. Every student will be expected to participate in each debate. The debate topic will be distributed in advance, and the “pro” and “con” sides will be assigned. You will then have to plan with your team by developing arguments for your assigned position, as well as by anticipating arguments for your opponents’ position and developing responses.

For each argument analysis, a short passage will be distributed. In 2-3 pages, you will explain the argument in the passage. Further instructions will be distributed with the first assignment.

Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day late (for example, from A to A-, from A- to B+, and so on). Weekend days count. If you finish a late paper during a weekend, email it to us right away, and turn in a hard copy later. A paper is one day late if it is at all late; two days late if it is more than 24 hours late; three days late if it is more than 48 hours late; etc.

Extensions: Extensions will not be granted except under extreme circumstances.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is very serious. If I suspect plagiarism, I will refer the case to the University Committee on Discipline. If plagiarism is found to have occurred, this will result in an “F” on that assignment, and as a result, an “F” in the course. For an introduction to what constitutes plagiarism, please read the guide “Academic Integrity at Princeton,” which is linked to from this page: <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/08/intro/index.shtm>. Consult us if you have any further questions.

Adding or Dropping the Course: If you know you are going to drop the course, please email me right away to let me know, and also officially drop the course right away. If you know you want to add the course, please let me know after class; attend all lectures in the meantime.

### Major Deadlines:

Homework deadlines will be announced when the assignments are given.

Monday, September 29: First argument analysis due (2-3 pgs)

Wednesday, October 8: First Class Debate

Wednesday, October 15: Second argument analysis due (2-3 pgs)

Monday, November 10: First paper due (approx. 6 pgs)

Wednesday, November 12: Second Class Debate

Wednesday, November 26: Second paper due (8 pgs)

January 2008: Final Exam

## CALENDAR

This calendar is approximate. This list of readings is tentative. Readings may be removed, and readings may be added.

All readings will be available on the course Blackboard site, or can be found at the websites listed with the readings.

For some readings, only part of the document is assigned. In these cases, the syllabus lists which selection should be read.

Updates to the syllabus will occur regularly. The updates that are relevant to each weekend will be done by the end of the preceding Thursday. Go to Blackboard for the most recent version of the syllabus.

### I. Preliminaries

Monday, September 15

- Introduction to the course

Wednesday, September 17

- Pryor, James “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” and “Philosophical Terms and Methods” available at: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html> and <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html> (Read all six sections.)

### II. Is it permissible to intentionally create disabled children? Is deafness a disability?

Monday, September 22

- Spriggs, M. “Lesbian couple create a child who is deaf like them.” *J Med Ethics* 2002 28: 283.
- Anstey, K.W. “Are attempts to have impaired children justifiable?”
- Levy, N. “Deafness, culture, and choice.”

Tuesday, September 23, 8pm, location TBA

- Watch the film “Sound and Fury”

Note: If you absolutely cannot make this time, please watch the film on or before

September 22 at the Language Resource Center. See <http://www.princeton.edu/lrc> for hours.

Wednesday September 24

- Savulescu, Julian. "Deaf lesbians, 'designer disability,' and the future of medicine." *BMJ* 2002;325:771-773 ( 5 October )
- "Sound and Fury"

III. What counts as genetic therapy, as opposed to genetic enhancement? When is genetic selection required? Is it always permissible?

Monday, September 29

- Mill, John Stuart. Chapter 3: "Of individuality, as one of the elements of well-being". From *On Liberty*. (Read pp. 54-66 only.)
- Kass, Leon "Perfect Babies: Prenatal Diagnosis and the Equal Right to Life"
- First Argument Analysis Due (2-3 pages)

Wednesday, October 1

- Lee Silver, Department of Molecular Biology and Woodrow Wilson School, will be a visiting professor for this class
- Silver, Lee. "The Virtual Child" and "The Designer Child". Chapters 17-18 (pp. 199-239) of *Remaking Eden*. Avon; (October 1998).
- Sandel, Michael, "Mastery and Gift," Chapter 5 of *The Case Against Perfection*

Monday, October 6

- Bostrom, Nick and Toby Ord. "The Reversal Test: Eliminating Status Quo Bias in Applied Ethics" Sections 1-4 (pp. 656-674).

Wednesday, October 8

- First Class Debate

IV. Do we ever wrong anyone in creating them?

Monday, October 13

- Parfit, Derek. Sections 119-122 of Chapter 16: "The non-identity problem." From *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, 1984.

Wednesday, October 15

- Woodward, James. "The Non-Identity Problem." *Ethics*. Vol. 96, No. 4
- Hanser, Matthew. "Harming Future People." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 19, No. 1
- Second argument analysis due. (2-3 pages)

V. Is stem cell research permissible?

Monday, October 20

- Singer, Peter, and Agata Sagan. "The Moral Status of Stem Cells".
- George, Robert P. "Embryo Ethics"
- George, Robert P. "Democracy, Law, and the Human Person"

Wed, October 22

- McMahan, Jeff. "Killing Embryos for Stem Cell Research." *Metaphilosophy*.
- Silver, Lee. "The Embryonic Soul." Chapter 7 of *Challenging Nature*. † Read pp. 98-116.

*Fall Recess: October 25 to November 2.*

VI. Is abortion permissible? Is infanticide permissible? Do fetuses have moral status? What kind of moral status do infants have?

Mon, November 3

- Thomson, Judith Jarvis, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*

Wednesday, November 5

- Marquis, Don, "Why Abortion is Immoral" *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 86, No. 4
- Tooley, Michael, "Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.

Monday, November 10

- George, Robert, "Liberal Political Theory and the Culture of Death" from *The Class of Orthodoxies*. Read pp. 39-43.
- First paper due. (6 pages)

Wednesday, November 12

- Second Class Debate

VII. As our desires change—even change radically due to Alzheimers—does what is good for us change as well? What is best for someone who has been transformed from her mature adult self? How should we think of old age? How much effort should we put into battling death?

Monday, November 17

- Jaworska, Agnieszka. "Respecting the Margins of Agency: Alzheimer's Patients and the Capacity to Value." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 28, No. 2.
- Dworkin, Ronald. *Life's Dominion*. JUST READ PAGES 218-237.

Wednesday, November 19

- Bostrom, Nick. "The Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant." *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2005, Vol. 31, No. 5, pp 273-277.
- Maclean, Douglas. "Longevity." Draft manuscript, March 2006 (please do not circulate without permission). Read sections 1-6.

VIII. When is killing a favor? Is killing someone to spare her pain ever permissible?

Monday, November 24

- Rachels, James “Active and Passive Euthanasia”
- Sullivan, Thomas D. “Active and Passive Euthanasia: An Impertinent Distinction?”

Wednesday, November 26

- John Rawls, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, T. M. Scanlon, Thomas Nagel. “Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief” *New York Review of Books* Volume 44, Number 5, March 27, 1997.  
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1237>
- The President’s Council on Bioethics. “Chapter 4. Ethical Caregiving: Principle and Prudence in Hard Cases” available at:  
[http://www.bioethics.gov/reports/taking\\_care/taking\\_care.pdf](http://www.bioethics.gov/reports/taking_care/taking_care.pdf) Read pp 166-171, 178-182, 187-191.
- Second paper due. (8 pages.)

Monday, December 1

- Kuhse, Helga and Peter Singer, “Should all seriously disabled infants live?”
- Kuhse, Helga and Peter Singer “For sometimes letting--and helping—die”

Tuesday, December 2, 8pm, room TBA—tentative time  
Watch the film “Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind”

Wednesday, December 3

- "Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind"

IX. When is it permissible to massage one's memories?

Monday, December 8

- Adam Kolber, University of San Diego School of Law, will be a visiting professor for this class.
- Kolber, Adam J., "Therapeutic Forgetting: The Legal and Ethical Implications of Memory Dampening" . *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 2006 Available at SSRN: <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=887061>>. Read pp. 1562-1577 and 1598-1622, not including footnotes.
- Loftus, Elizabeth, F. "Creating False Memories." *Scientific American* Sept 1997, vol 2007 #3 pp 70-75.  
<<http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm>>

Wednesday, December 10

- Summary of the semester

Monday, January 12

- Mandatory Review Session, 2-3:30pm

There will be a final exam during exam period in January.