Instructor:
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Office Hours: Wednesday 10am-noon.

Description:
An examination of ethical issues surrounding the creation of new persons. We will look both at the individual decision to procreate as well as at social policies that influence the number, identity, and wellbeing of future persons. Among the questions we will consider are:

• Can I harm or benefit a person by bringing her into existence?
• Can it be wrong for me to create a person whose life is well worth living, because instead of bringing her into existence I could have created a numerically distinct person whose life would have foreseeably gone better? If so, why?
• If I have a moral reason not to create a child whose life would foreseeably be miserable, is there a corresponding moral reason to create a child whose life would be happy? If not, what might explain the asymmetry in our judgments?
• All else equal, does the world go better if more happy lives are created? Does the world go better the larger the total utility contained in all lives that are ever lived?
• What reasons, if any, are there for wanting humankind to survive for as long as possible?
• What is the significance of posterity (i.e. the fact that there will be people living after our death) for our own lives?

In the course of discussing these questions, we will grapple with four famous (and notoriously difficult) problems in population ethics that were first systematically discussed by Derek Parfit in Part IV of his book Reasons and Persons: the Non-Identity Problem, the Asymmetry, the Repugnant Conclusion, and the Mere Addition Paradox.

Requirements:
Students taking the seminar for credit should post a question or comment on the assigned readings to the course website by 10pm on the night before class. Auditors are welcome to do so as well. Final papers should be 20-25 double-spaced pages and are due on Tuesday, May 13.

Guest Speakers:
We are very fortunate to have two guest speakers this semester. Professors Jeff McMahan and Larry Temkin will visit the seminar on March 6 and May 1 respectively, to lead discussion of their work on population ethics.
Schedule of Topics and Readings

February 6: Introduction to the Non-Identity Problem

February 13: Further responses to the Non-Identity Problem
Elizabeth Harman, “Can We Harm and Benefit in Creating?”, Philosophical Perspectives (2004).
Caspar Hare, “Voices From Another World: Must We Respect the Interests of People Who Do Not, and Will Never, Exist?”, Ethics (2007).

February 20: Can creating a person benefit that person?
Derek Parfit, Appendix G: “Whether Causing Someone to Exist Can Benefit This Person” in his Reasons and Persons (OUP, 1984).

February 27: Do we have moral reason to create new happy persons because they will be happy? Does the world go better if we do?

March 6: Guest Speaker: Jeff McMahan (Rutgers)
Further responses to the Asymmetry
Johann Frick, “Conditional Reasons and the Procreation Asymmetry” (manuscript).

March 13: Procreative harm and ‘wrongful life’ suits
March 20: **SPRING RECESS—NO SEMINAR MEETING**

March 27: **The Repugnant Conclusion**


April 3: **The Mere Addition Paradox**


April 10: **Can an appeal to “imprecise comparability” solve the problems of population ethics?**

Derek Parfit, “Towards Theory X: Parts I and II” (manuscript).

April 17: **Does it matter morally that humankind (or our post-human descendants) survive for as long as possible?**

Nick Beckstead, excerpts from *On the Overwhelming Importance of Shaping the Far Future* (manuscript).

April 24: **What is the significance of posterity for our own lives?**


May 1: **Guest Speaker: Larry Temkin (Rutgers)**

The Mere Addition Paradox and the Nature of Moral Ideals