

Reconstructing the self : problems of choice, fate and justification in the eugenics debate

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Propositions

Reconstructing the Self

Problems of Choice, Fate and Justification in the Eugenics Debate

by

Laurens Landeweerd

1. The existing ethical framework on selective reproduction through prenatal diagnosis does not exclude the possibility of eugenics (*this PhD thesis*).
2. Selective reproduction motivated by an ideologically burdened concept of the good society leads to an instrumentalisation of individual life to this ideology. This means the liberal eugenicist's proposal for selection of human traits to equalise future generations' chances of opportunity and wellbeing renders the person instrumental to these goals of equality, whilst these goals should remain instrumental to the person (*this PhD thesis*).
3. The idea of a liberal eugenics is contradictory in so far as one accepts that concepts of the perfect body are culturally determined: either one lays down what counts as 'eu'genics, therefore illiberally excluding certain options, or one allows for all conceivable reproductive choices, be they generally considered as 'eu' or 'dys'genics. Instead of entering into this contradiction, one should ask whether it is ethically justifiable to make decisions for future people that will determine their identity in a specific way. Therefore, selective reproduction should not go beyond the prevention of individual suffering (*this PhD thesis*).
4. Since it creates a separation between the traits one has and the person one is, the concept of autonomous moral agency as presented by analytic proponents of a liberal eugenics is flawed: the concept of autonomy cannot be defined through the concept of 'free choice'. One has to define it on the basis of a concept of a 'self' that 'wills' (*this PhD thesis*).

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5. The problem of a liberal eugenics does not lie in that one cannot define what can objectively be defined as eugenics, but in an inequality between parent and child: eugenics may be liberal for the prospective parents, but it will not be so for the person that results from their choices. What will remain fate for the eugenically created or selected was choice for the parents and this creates an intergenerational asymmetry (*this PhD thesis, elaborating on Habermas*).
6. The emphasis on developing methodologies for bioethics has obscured the necessity of an ethical understanding of the subjects at hand.
7. The connection between practical ethics, theoretical ethics and metaphysics is necessary to answer the question 'what would be wrong with designing people?' since practical ethics cannot deal with the age-old Diogenesian question 'what is a person?'
8. In the triangle rationality, morality and intuition, the bioengineer combines the first and the last, the ethicist the first and the second, the layman in a local bar the second and the last. To cure the engineer's deficiency, he should therefore visit bars more often. Since most philosophers would merely question the triangle, they can often already be found there.
9. Philosophy is beautiful in how it tries to start at an absolute point zero for thought, but tragic in that it hardly appears to get away from there (*paraphrased after Cornelis Verhoeven*).
10. The protocol for the assessment of a thesis needs to be applied to the practice of that assessment. How to apply such a protocol seems to demand for yet another protocol, that of the interpretation of that protocol to the practice of assessing a thesis. This replicates the problem on a meta-level, leading to a *reductio ad absurdum*. This however, is not a reason to discard with the concept of protocols altogether, since with a radical pragmatist attitude on such matters, a thesis would remain in a perpetual limbo of readjustment.
11. Ethics is not a game of chess.