



The Value of Genetic Ties

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Velleman

- Being raised in contact with biological relations is important for two key reasons;
 - Development of self
 - Self-knowledge
 - A mirror of sorts
 - How others importantly similar to me navigate the world
 - Self-worth, confidence, etc.
 - Finding one's place in the world
 - Narratives that give life meaning
 - Reconciling the objective with the subjective
 - Understanding how one came to be

Empirical aside

- Velleman assumes “genetic essentialism”
- How strong is the evidence for the genetic basis of personality / other complex traits?
- Twin studies
- Monozygotic twins reared apart
 - Claim: we’ve varied the environment but kept the genetic component constant. This should allow us to determine what effects are environmental. Traits that are stable across varied environments are likely genetic.

Empirical aside

- Problem: How different are the 'environments'?
- Generally same (or very similar):
 - Socio-economic family
 - Language
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Education
 - Culture
 - Prenatal environment
- Likely to have a large effect on the traits in question
- Similar environments and same genes → hard to tell what is genetic

Empirical aside

- What about comparisons between monozygotic and dizygotic twins?
 - Environment is the same, genes are different
- Problem: How similar are the environments?
- Turns out the monozygotic twins **are** treated differently
 - We have not kept the environment constant, so it's hard to tell what is due to environmental variation and what is due to genetic variation
- Joseph, Jay. "Twin studies in psychiatry and psychology: science or pseudoscience?." *Psychiatric Quarterly* 73.1 (2002): 71-82.

Joseph, Jay. *The trouble with twin studies: A reassessment of twin research in the social and behavioral sciences*. Routledge, 2014.

Haslanger

- How much self-knowledge do we get from being around those genetically similar to us?
- But we also gain knowledge about ourselves from being around people who are different!
- Empirical evidence suggest that those raised in non-biological families are no worse off
- In some cases being raised by people that are very similar to us is bad
- For Velleman's argument to go through, we'd have to think that it is a great loss to self-knowledge to be raised by non-biological kin. This is a high bar. Has he provided a case for this?

Haslanger

What about our place in the world?

- It's true that our narrative histories help providing meaning to our lives
- Has been structured around biology
 - Likely due to biological facts, like the care of children
- But we construct narratives in many different ways
 - Some don't require intimate contact, just facts about family history
 - We can tell stories about who we are that do not depend on biological lineage
 - This may even be a good thing!
 - Racism
 - Nepotism
 - We can identify with the larger world in a variety of ways

Haslanger

It's true that currently society places a lot of importance on biology, and this might cause people to think that their biological narrative is important

- This makes matters tricky
- That something is given social importance does not mean it is not a 'need' or that its absence is not harmful (Adam Smith)
- But at the same time, we don't want to reproduce bad social practices
 - Eg. race and gender
- Try to avoid harming children while also fighting against norms
- Complicating the family may be a good way to do this!



Haslanger

- Enshrining a ‘right’ to information about biological ancestry sends a message that it is indeed very important
- Perhaps a more tailored approach is better:

“Living under the shadow of the natural nuclear family schema, it is reasonable to provide children with information about or contact with their biological relations, if and when this becomes an issue in their forming a healthy identity. However, if we are to avoid harming our children, then rather than enshrining a schema that most families fail to exemplify and which is used to stigmatize and alienate families that are (yes!) as good as their biological counterparts, we should instead make every effort to disrupt the hegemony of the schema”



Discussion

- Should we settle the 'right to know' on empirical grounds?
- Does Haslanger's more tailored approach
 - Go too far?
 - Not far enough?

Midterm II Long-Answer Questions

Instructions

Answer all questions in exam booklets. Answer **one** of the following questions. As a rough guide, the answer should be approx. 800 - 1200 words.

Questions:

- 1) Explain Millum's account of how parental rights are acquired and explain one problem the view faces.
- 2) Explain why Brake thinks that current child support practices are unjust, and assess the strength of her claim.
- 3) Explain and assess a solution to the non-identity problem. Your answer must substantially engage with at least one reading.
- 4) **(Wild card)** What obligations, if any, do gamete donors have towards their biological offspring? Your answer must substantially engage with at least one reading.