



# Phil 173: Child support and choice

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# Parental Responsibility

Hazmat theory:

- Heightened responsibility when exercising control over hazardous materials
  - Eg uranium, a pet lion
  - Have responsibilities *even if* there is no wrongdoing
  - Why? The burden of not engaging in 'risky' activity is vastly outweighed by the burden others face if the risk materializes
    - Consider breathing
  - So we have obligations for the consequences of the choices we make with our gametes

# Parental Responsibility

Hazmat theory:

- What about stolen gamete cases?
- What about medical professionals?
  - Acting as agents

So what about the Joe's?

- Accidental pregnancy
- Sperm donor
- Both have responsibilities!

# Parental Responsibility

Can responsibilities be transferred?

- Some might, but relational ones cannot
- Parental responsibilities include the responsibility to form (or be open to forming) relationships
  - Cannot be transferred!
- What about adoption?
  - Can relinquish children out of love for them
  - Wrong to wilfully take on responsibilities one intends not to fulfil (gamete donation but not adoption)
  - Maybe adoption in non-ideal

# Parental Responsibility

Problems with the Hazmat theory:

- Are gametes ‘hazardous materials’?
  - Is the account too broad?
- Are parental responsibilities really non-transferrable?
  - Some might, but relational ones cannot
  - Parental responsibilities include the responsibility to form (or be open to forming) relationships
    - Cannot be transferred!
- “Parental responsibility includes the responsibility to provide for one’s child’s basic needs, at least to the best of one’s ability. My misgivings regarding transferring parental responsibility are based on the premise that love is one of a child’s basic needs. If a child’s basic needs include the need to be loved, it is unclear to me that a responsibility of this kind – a responsibility to relate with a particular feeling

# Parental Responsibility

- How might we reply:
  - Argue the conclusion does not follow from Hazmat
  - Argue that transfers of responsibility **are** possible
  - Argue that the Hazmat account is wrong
    - Different account of responsibilities
    - Maybe we are wrong about Joe Blow
  - Accept the conclusion!

# Brake's argument

- We don't think that causing a person to exist necessarily results in obligations towards that person
- More general claim: we don't have obligations for *all* the downstream consequences of our actions
- If we think that sex with precautions does not result in a duty to gestate, then why should we think that sex does not result in a duty to support a child financially?
- Disanalogies?
  - Bodily integrity – but is that enough?
  - But also depends on our justification for abortion
- What about adoption?
  - Single people can adopt
  - We are permitted to divest ourselves of parental obligations, why should both parties have to agree?



# Some possible responses

Counterarguments:

- Inequality
- Too much of a burden on individuals who are gestating
- Background social agreement
- Who should care for children?