

BIOETHICS & GENETICS RESEARCH

PROFESSOR: Dr. Blake Hereth (“Dr. H”)

PRONOUNS: they/them

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OFFICE: Dugan Hall 200L (South Campus)

CLASS MEETINGS: MWF 10:00-10:50am in **TBD**

E-OFFICE: Collaborate Ultra (Blackboard)

E-STUDENT HOURS: Tuesday/Thursday 10:00-10:50am and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Most of us were created using our parents’ own genetic material. However, tens of thousands of people weren’t created this way, but rather were created using a *donor’s* genetic material – sperm, egg, or both. Some parents decide to disclose this fact to their children, whereas others don’t. What should be done in this case? In this course, we will examine a 2021 book by Professor Daniel Groll called *Conceiving People: Genetic Knowledge and the Ethics of Sperm and Egg Donation*, in which he argues that parents of donor children have a moral obligation to use only open (i.e., non-anonymous) donors. With this deep dive into a family of issues in bioethics, students will (1) gain an understanding of some of the important issues in contemporary medical ethics, (2) become familiar with the variety of perspectives, arguments, and people involved in these debates, (3) develop a concise, polished philosophical paper presenting an original argument on an important course topic, and (4) revise their argument in light of feedback.

ESSENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES (ELOS)

- Social Responsibility & Ethics (SRE): This course meets the Core Curriculum Social Responsibility and Ethics Essential Learning Outcome; it provides students the opportunity to reason about right and wrong conduct, to assess moral beliefs and practices, and to apply that knowledge to make a positive difference in the community and the world.

COURSE GOALS:

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- understand the pivotal issues in the ethics of sperm and egg donation, as discussed by Professor Daniel Groll;
- reconstruct arguments they find on the issues above and evaluate them charitably and critically;
- develop a concise, polished philosophical paper presenting an original argument on an important course topic; and
- revise their argument in light of instructor feedback.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Class Participation (15%): Class will be held in **TBD**. Do the required readings carefully and come prepared to discuss them. Then, when in class, discuss them. You won't receive credit just for being present.
- Critical Questions (20%): Each day of class, students must submit a critical question for that day's assigned reading. (That's about two per week. If there are multiple readings assigned for that day, choose only one to write a question about.) Each critical question should be substantive and reflect strong familiarity with the reading and will serve as a starting point for class discussions. Students with last names A-M should submit questions for Weeks 2-8; students with last names N-Z should submit questions for Weeks 9-13 and 15-16. (So, each student will submit a total of roughly 14 critical questions.) The questions are due by 5pm the night before the class day for which the reading is assigned. Students who submit substantive critical questions on the relevant reading by the required time will receive full credit.
- Critical Reading Responses (25%): Each student will write five (5) critical reading responses. All you need to do is (1) briefly explain what the argument is you're evaluating and (2) raise an important criticism of the argument. Each reading response should be one page long, double-spaced. It's up to you which reading you pick, but I recommend that you get started early.
- Draft Paper (10%): Each student should write a 3,000-word draft paper (exclusive of notes and bibliography) where they make an original, creative argument on a relevant course topic. (See the Blackboard rubric for further details.) The Draft Paper is due Friday, March 17th, at 5pm on Blackboard.
- Final Paper (30%): Each student should write a 4,000-word paper (exclusive of notes and bibliography) in which they revise their Draft Paper in light of my feedback. The idea is to polish, and add to, the Draft Paper. The Final Paper is due Friday, May 5th, at 5pm on Blackboard.

GRADING SCALE:

I use a standard grading scale for this course:

- A = 90-100%
- B = 80-89.99%
- C = 70-79.99%
- D = 60-69.99%
- F = 59.99 or below

TEXTBOOK(S):

- Daniel Groll, *Conceiving People: Genetic Knowledge and the Ethics of Sperm and Egg Donation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
 - **Click [here](#) for a free online copy!**
- All other readings will be made available via Blackboard.

READING SCHEDULE:

(NOTE: THIS IS A TENTATIVE READING SCHEDULE. I MAY ADJUST IT DEPENDING ON NEED OR CLASS PROGRESS. BOLDED READINGS ARE ON BLACKBOARD; NON-BOLDED READINGS ARE IN THE TEXTBOOK.)

WEEK 1 (JAN 18 & 20): COURSE INTRODUCTION + *OUR FATHER* DOCUMENTARY

Readings:

- Syllabus
- *Our Father* (Netflix documentary)

WEEK 2 (JAN 23, 25, & 27): THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Readings:

- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 1 & Afterward

WEEK 3 (JAN 30, FEB 1, & 3): KEEPING SECRETS

Readings:

- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 2
- Vardit Ravitsky, “Conceived and Deceived: The Medical Interests of Donor-Conceived Individuals”

WEEK 4 (FEB 6, 8, & 10): THE SIGNIFICANT INTEREST VIEW

Readings:

- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 3

WEEK 5 (FEB 13, 15, & 17): THE SIGNIFICANT INTEREST VIEW

Readings:

- David Velleman, “Family History”
- Kimberly Leighton, “Addressing the Harms of Not Knowing One’s Heredity: Lessons from Genealogical Bewilderment”
- Amanda Roth, “Why Knowing One’s Genetic Origins is Not a Right, a Basic Good, or a Significant Interest”

WEEK 6 (FEB 20, 22, & 24): THE VALUE OF GENETIC KNOWLEDGE

Readings:

- **No class Monday, Feb 20 (Presidents’ Day)**
- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 4

WEEK 7 (FEB 28, MAR 1, & 3): THE VALUE OF GENETIC KNOWLEDGE

Readings:

- Joanna E. Scheib, Alice Ruby, and Jean Benward, “Who Requests Their Sperm Donor’s Identity? The First Ten Years of Information Releases to Adults with Open-Identity Donors”
- Sally Haslanger, “Family, Ancestry, and Self: What is the Moral Significance of Biological Ties?”
- Hallvard Lillehammer, “Who Cares Where You Come From?”

WEEK 8 (MAR 6, 8, & 10): SPRING BREAK!

- **No class this week (Spring Break)**

WEEK 9 (MAR 13, 15, & 17): THE BIONORMATIVE PREJUDICE

Readings:

- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 5
- **Draft Paper due Friday, March 17, at 5pm**

WEEK 10 (MAR 20, 22, & 24): THE BIONORMATIVE PREJUDICE

Readings:

- Charlotte Witt, “A Critique of the Bionormative Conception of the Family”
- Alice MacLachlan, “Conceiving Differently”
- Amanda Roth, “Nonideal Theory and Ethical Pragmatism in Bioethics: Value Conflicts in LGBTQ+ Family-Making”

WEEK 11 (MAR 27, 29, & 31): TIPPING THE SCALE

Readings:

- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 6
- Amanda Roth, “Anonymous vs. Open Donor Conception, Children’s Interests, and the Parental as Political”

WEEK 12 (APR 3, 5, & 7): THE DONOR’S RESPONSIBILITIES

Readings:

- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 7

WEEK 13 (APR 10, 12, & 14): THE DONOR’S RESPONSIBILITIES

Readings:

- Joseph Millum, “How Do We Acquire Parental Responsibilities?”
 - Note: Millum defends the Never Responsible camp.
- Rivka Weinberg, “The Moral Complexity of Sperm Donation”
- Andrew Botterell, “Why Gametes Are Not Like Enriched Uranium”

WEEK 14 (APR 17, 19, & 21): POLICY AND PRACTICE

Readings:

- **No class Monday, Apr 17 (Patriot’s Day)**
- Groll, *Conceiving People*, Chapter 8

WEEK 15 (APR 24, 26, & 28): POLICY AND PRACTICE

Readings:

- Susan Dominus, “Sperm Donors Can’t Stay Secret Anymore: Here’s What That Means”
- Emily McTernan, “Should Fertility Treatment Be State Funded?”
- Nathan Hodson and Joshua Parker, “The Ethical Case for Non-Directed Postmortem Sperm Donation”

WEEK 16 (MAY 1, 3, & 5): FINALS WEEK!

- **Final Paper due Friday, May 5, at 5pm**

POLICIES:

- Respect of Self and Others: As a (mostly) consistent Kantian, I expect everyone in this course to maintain a certain level of self-respect. This means taking yourself seriously (although not *too* seriously) and avoiding excessive self-deprecation. You are valuable and an important part of the philosophical community. I also expect everyone in this course to maintain respect for others. Philosophical engagement is often aggressive and it’s easy to see why: Sometimes you develop a devastating objection to someone’s argument, and you want to deliver it in epic fashion. But we won’t indulge those impulses here. It’s okay to care about the material and to discuss it passionately, but *don’t* interrupt others, *do* be equitable with your speaking time (and be aware that we’re often bad judges of when we’ve exceeded our equitable speaking time), *do* aim to help someone identify any flaws in their view *and* make suggestions for how they might improve it, and *do* respect others’ pronouns.

- Student Hours: At the top of this syllabus, you will see a list of ‘student hours.’ Those are times I set aside just for you. During that time, I will be available to you via Blackboard’s online Collaborate Ultra feature. Signing in is easy: Log into Blackboard, select our course, click the “Collaborate Ultra” tab on the left, click “Course Room,” then click “Join Course Room.” Stop by to ask questions, get clarity on an assignment, brainstorm your paper, talk philosophy, tell me about yourself, or get some encouragement. (College is hard—it was *very* hard for me—and there’s zero shame in that.) If you want to meet with me face-to-face, email me to make an appointment and we’ll pick a time to meet in my Dugan 200L office.
- Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to attend class regularly, as regular attendance is one of the most important contributors to student success. However, students may occasionally need to miss class due to illness, emergency, or caring for a sick family member. In such cases, you are responsible for notifying me of your absences and working with me to arrange to make up any missed work. I will be very accommodating to students who are experiencing pandemic-related challenges, but you must communicate your requests with me regularly and with as much advance-notice as possible. Likewise, if I should need to miss class, I will communicate with you as soon as possible with clear instructions.
- Tutoring Resources and Centers for Learning and Academic Support Services (CLASS): CLASS will be offering [tutoring](#) and [Writing Center](#) services both in-person and virtually.
- Student Mental Health and Well-being: We are a campus that cares about the mental health and well-being of all individuals in our campus community, particularly during this uncertain time. If you or someone you know are experiencing mental health challenges at UMass Lowell, please contact [Counseling Services](#). They will be offering free in-person counselling for all students.
- Disability Services: If you have a documented disability that will require classroom accommodation, please notify me as soon as possible, so that we might make appropriate arrangements. Please speak to me during office hours or send me an email, as I respect, and want to protect, your privacy. Visit the [Student Disability Services webpage](#) for further information. Additionally, Student Disability Services supports software for ALL students. Read&Write Gold is literacy software that allows you to read on-screen text aloud, research and check written work, and create study guides. You can download the software from the IT Software webpage on the UML website: [IT Software page](#)
- Diversity, Inclusion, and Classroom Community Standards: UMass Lowell—and your professor—value human diversity in all its forms, whether expressed through race and ethnicity, culture, political and social views, religious and spiritual beliefs, language and geographic characteristics, gender, gender identities and sexual orientations, learning and physical abilities, age, parenting status and social or economic backgrounds. I am committed to conducting my classroom in a way that respects and values diversity of all kinds, and I encourage you also to enrich yourself by practicing respect in your interactions, and enrich one another by expressing your point of view, knowing that diversity and individual differences are respected, appreciated, and recognized as a source of strength.
- Academic Integrity Policy: All students are advised that there is a [University policy regarding academic integrity](#). Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work.
- Credit Hour Policy: Federal definition of a credit hour requires that for every course credit awarded, a course must offer 15 hours of instructor-led course activities and 30 hours

of out-of-class student work. This means that a standard 3 credit hour course requires 45 hours of instructor-led course activities and 90 hours of out-of-class student work.

- **University Privacy Statement:** UMass Lowell recognizes the importance of mutual trust between students and faculty. Massachusetts is a two-party consent state, which means it is illegal to record someone without their permission. Recordings of classroom lectures are the intellectual property of the instructor. Instructors have the right to prohibit audio and video recording of their lectures, unless the requesting student is registered with Disabilities Services and recording of class sessions is an approved accommodation. In addition, sharing or selling recordings of classroom activities, discussions or lectures with any other person or medium without permission of the instructor is prohibited.
- **Health and Safety:** The safety and health of the UMass Lowell community is our shared priority. In seeking to provide the fullest academic and campus life experience possible, UMass Lowell will rely on all members of our community to act responsibly. For the latest updates on UMass Lowell's COVID policies, please visit www.uml.edu/coronavirus. UMass Lowell has implemented reasonable health and safety protocols in accordance with national and state public health guidelines. These standards apply to anyone who is physically present on campus or participating in a UMass Lowell-sponsored activity.
 - **Daily Symptom Checker:** All campus community members should use the [daily symptom checker](http://www.uml.edu/alert/coronavirus/COVID-19-symptom-review.aspx) (www.uml.edu/alert/coronavirus/COVID-19-symptom-review.aspx) every day prior to leaving your home, apartment, or room.
 - **Vaccination:** COVID-19 vaccination is required for ALL students (with rare and approved exceptions). Please visit the Massachusetts Vaccine Finder website (vaxfinder.mass.gov) to find vaccine locations.
 - **Face Coverings:** Face coverings are required for all faculty, staff, students, vendors and visitors regardless of vaccination status in nearly all indoor common spaces, including classrooms, instructional laboratories, meeting rooms, work areas, break rooms, hallways, elevators and restrooms. Face coverings are not required outdoors. Faculty may opt to remove face coverings when teaching.
- **Problems with the Course:** If you have concerns or suggestions regarding this course, I encourage you to speak to me directly about them. (I will also give you ample opportunities to provide feedback, which I value.) If you would prefer to speak with someone else, however, you may contact:

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