

2010

Making Parents: Conventions, Intentions, and Biological Connections

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Original Publication Citation

Pearson, Y. (2010). Making parents: Conventions, intentions, and biological connections. In S. Scales, L. Oravec, & A. Potthast (Eds.), *The Ethics of the Family* (pp. 194-206). Cambridge Scholars Publishing. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-4438-2057-8>

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The Ethics of the Family

Edited by

Stephen Scales, Adam Potthast
and Linda Oravecz

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Ethics of the Family,
Edited by Stephen Scales, Adam Potthast and Linda Oravecz

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2057-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2057-8

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MAKING PARENTS: CONVENTIONS, INTENTIONS, AND BIOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS

YVETTE PEARSON

Weaving a Tangled Web?

First, I will explore apparent inconsistencies surrounding the importance attached to intentions and genetic connections in determining who has parental rights or obligations and how attitudes regarding the relative importance of these elements have influenced various conventions/social practices. Both intentions and genetic connections carry significant weight to the extent that taking them into account serves the interests of those who are either attempting to procreate or have succeeded. In some cases intentions carry more weight than genetic connections, and vice versa. I will also discuss another relevant biological connection—the gestational connection between women and offspring—but it is worth noting that this has almost always been viewed (and valued) to the extent that it indicates a genetic connection with the child. Regardless of whether primacy is given to intentions or biological connections, especially genetic connections, the main focus is on the desires of those attempting to procreate rather than the ability of prospective parents to fulfill obligations toward offspring. Instead of focusing on likely impact of emphasizing one or the other on the welfare of offspring, whether intentions or genetic connections are regarded as significant is usually determined by the goals or desires of the procreators.

Intention

Though many people spend a fair amount of time and money trying to avoid procreation, some people do intend to procreate. And in many cases they succeed. However, when sexual interaction does not or cannot result in progeny, creating or acquiring children requires intentional acts aimed

specifically at bringing children into the world or into the home of those who wish to rear them. Aside from these circumstances, however, the relationship between intention and procreation can be difficult to establish. There may be no identifiable intentions at all—either to procreate or to avoid it—or the precise content of the intention might be difficult to determine. Even when intentions are clearly stated (e.g., in surrogacy agreements or gamete vendor consent forms) or when they are implied by the mere act of going to a fertility clinic and asking for assistance, it remains unclear what weight those intentions should carry. Even if a clear intention regarding procreation can be identified, it can still be challenging to figure out whether intentions have changed over time or which intentions actually “count”. It is possible that a person might intend at T1 to procreate and rear a child but intend otherwise at T2. Intentions don’t have expiration dates attached to them. It is unclear, for example, whether the intention at T1 should take precedence over that at T2 or vice versa, or the extent to which the context in which either intention is formed ought to be considered morally relevant.

In the absence of explicit contracts, which are rarely present in the context of procreation, it can be difficult to determine a person’s intentions with respect to procreation. Furthermore, even if there is something as clear as a written document or some other evidence of the person’s intentions (e.g., embryos created with gametes that the person had voluntarily left at a fertility clinic), there remains the possibility that her intentions may be altered by various factors. For example, a couple may agree to use their gametes to create fertilized eggs via IVF with the initial intention of transferring them to the woman’s uterus but decide later that they do not want to attempt to create a child in this manner. Chan and Quigley have argued for the contentious claim that once a person has agreed to “engage in IVF for purposes of having a child...[he/she] has ceded any right...not to become a genetic [parent] of the child that the embryo would become.”¹ This means that once this first step has been taken, neither party should be permitted to stop the other from moving forward and transferring the fertilized egg in an attempt to create a child. But this is problematic, insofar as it assumes the irreversibility of an intention to procreate and suggests that merely *willing* to create, bear, and rear a child carries with it the same obligations as following through with these actions. There is no turning back after that point; one is held accountable for intending to bring into existence a child to whom one

¹ Sarah Chan and Muireann Quigley, “Frozen Embryos, Genetic Information, and Reproductive Rights,” *Bioethics* 22, no. 8 (2007): 447.

would have moral obligations. The problem with Chan and Quigley's position is an apparent failure to distinguish carefully between rights and obligations toward children and those we might have toward zygotes or early embryos. Moreover, if we consider more typical cases where people intend to procreate, this view proves to have problematic implications. For example, consider the case of a couple expressing an intention to procreate, attempting to do so via intercourse, but ultimately failing to achieve pregnancy or losing the pregnancy due to miscarriage. The couple may subsequently decide to wait for months or years before attempting to procreate, or they might decide against becoming parents. Chan and Quigley's view suggests that the couple should follow through with their original intention despite their reasons for having changed their minds, given their view that one's intention to procreate, expressed by creating IVF embryos or agreeing with one's partner to do so, is irrevocable.

Despite the presence of explicit agreements in contexts in which third parties are involved in the procreative process, such as gestational surrogates or gamete vendors, questions arise about the moral relevance and relative weight of the intentions of the various parties involved. Although people often follow through with their first intentions, there have been some well-publicized cases of surrogate mothers or "intended parents" changing their minds either during the pregnancy or once the child is born. Additionally, there are gamete donors/vendors who desire to connect with their progeny or come to regret their previous decision. Likewise, some children created using donor/vendor gametes develop a desire to find their genetic parents. Such problems arise despite the seemingly clear beginnings of certain types of procreative endeavors, so it is little wonder that things remain unclear in cases where procreation is *not* well thought out.

One of the most flagrant mixed messages related to the relevance of intention in the procreative process involves the clear intention on the part of a gamete vendor/donor that his/her gametes be used in attempts to create children. While there are no guarantees that their gametes will lead to the creation of a take-home baby, the intention on the part of the gamete vendor is clear. In such cases, however, the gamete vendor, who participates (intentionally) in procreation this way, is not held accountable for the resultant offspring. Intent to procreate in this manner does not entail in our society an obligation to rear the offspring. In fact the vendor consent forms usually state explicitly that the vendors have neither rights nor responsibilities toward the offspring. More problematically, and unlike cases of adoption, the vendors in the U.S. are not given any kind of assurance that their progeny will be properly cared for and are given no

means of following up to make sure. This purely contractual view of parental obligation has struck some as a strange arrangement. For example, Daniel Callahan made the following observation regarding the practice of anonymous sperm donation: "It is as if everyone argued: Look males have always been fathering children anonymously and irresponsibly; why not put this otherwise noxious trait to good use?"²

Juxtaposed to this state of affairs is the social convention that the creation of a child when there is no intention to do so, or perhaps even a clear intention to avoid doing so, may entail obligations toward the child. For example, if a sexual interlude between two virtual strangers results in a child, the biological father of the child is often required to provide financial support. He cannot be compelled to participate otherwise in the child's upbringing, but he is held accountable to some degree regardless of whether he intended to procreate. For obvious reasons, e.g., self-interest or feeling betrayed by the child's mother, several nonvoluntary/involuntary fathers disagree with the notion that they ought to be held accountable for their progeny. And while the view of the involuntary father is more often backed by emotion, e.g., feelings of resentment rather than principled opposition to supporting offspring created unintentionally, others have argued that the practice of forcing men to pay child support is morally suspect. For example, Brake,³ Fuscaldo,⁴ and Weinberg,⁵ among others, have questioned the implicit assumption that being causally responsible for the existence of a child entails moral responsibility.⁶ Brake argues that while a man may be obligated to "share certain costs *immediately* incurred as a result of sex, his responsibility comes to an end when [the woman] gives birth."⁷ She argues that the obligation is owed to the woman not the resultant child. However, this seems to rest on a confusion about to whom obligations are owed. Arguably, neither men nor women are obligated to embryos qua embryos (e.g., there is no obligation to bring all embryos to term), but we do have obligations toward *children*. Thus, I agree with Weinberg's assertion that we are responsible for what happens to gametes that develop into beings with moral status if we choose to take risks with

² Daniel Callahan, "Bioethics and Fatherhood," *Utah Law Review* 3 (1992): 741.

³ Elizabeth Brake, "Fatherhood and Child Support: Do Men Have a Right to Choose?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (2005): 55-73.

⁴ Guiliana Fuscaldo, "Genetic Ties: Are They Morally Binding?" *Bioethics* 20, no. 2 (2006): 64-76.

⁵ Rivka Weinberg, "The Moral Complexity of Sperm Donation," *Bioethics* 22, no. 3 (2008): 166-78.

⁶ Brake, "Fatherhood and Child Support," 61.

⁷ Brake, "Fatherhood and Child Support," 63.

our gametes *qua* hazardous materials.⁸ Though obligations toward children can later be transferred through various mechanisms, e.g., adoption, the fact that transfer is required implies that the person doing the transferring possesses the obligations (or rights) that they are transferring. This view does not require that we subscribe to the view that parenthood is grounded solely in genetics; instead, the relevant feature is that the creation of a child was a reasonably foreseeable consequence of our actions.

In today's world, a gamete vendor who claims that he/she never intended to help rear the children that result from the use of his/her gametes is off the hook, and can probably point to a consent form or agreement that says just that. On the other hand, a man who finds out that he has inadvertently contributed to the existence of a child but claims that he never intended to either create a child or rear one will find his request to bow out of parental responsibility readily rejected. Hence, in contemporary society, intended procreation need not come with social enforcement of obligations, while unintended procreation usually does. This state of affairs is just one indication of our wildly inconsistent attitudes toward the relative importance of the presence (or absence) of procreative intentions.

Even though the intention of an involuntary father—i.e., to avoid procreation—is distinct from that of the gamete donor who *does* intend to procreate, there is no distinction in these cases in terms of reasonable foreseeability. So, even if either the gamete donor or the participant in the one night stand claims to be surprised by the outcome or retracts what seemed to be the obvious intention at the time of the action in question—i.e., the gamete sale or sexual interaction—that this was a reasonably foreseeable outcome of presumably voluntary actions is not a matter of dispute. Any informed, rational evaluator given the facts of either case would concede that the creation of a child was a reasonably foreseeable outcome in either case.

Conventions/Biological Connections

Genetic connections

Without providing an exhaustive list of conventions that have shaped our views of parenthood and corresponding social and legal practices, I want to point to a few that seem to have had a significant impact. One thread that runs through many prevailing conventions is the emphasis on

⁸ Weinberg, "Moral Complexity of Sperm Donation," 171.

genetic connections between parents and offspring, as captured in the saying "blood is thicker than water". The idea is that genetic connections trump other kinds of relationships among people. One consequence of this is that becoming a parent through traditional adoption arrangements is viewed as a last resort—something one does only if they are infertile and unsuccessful with attempts to circumvent their fertility problems. Another consequence of this emphasis on the importance of genetic connections is that in many legal disputes genetic connections have often carried greater weight in determining custody and child support than other factors, such as (a) an established social relationship between a child and a particular adult; (b) a gestational connection between a woman (genetically related or not) and a newborn; or (c) the intentions of genetically unrelated adults to rear the offspring.

In the previous section I discussed the convention that requires men to provide economic support to genetically related children who were created through voluntary sexual intercourse that led to the child's existence. Here, however, I will elaborate on the associated practice of using DNA testing to absolve one of responsibility toward children. As Bartholet puts it, men claim that "if a DNA match alone can be used to force [men] into parenthood, then the absence of a DNA match should enable them to escape parenthood."⁹ In some cases men are relieved of legal obligations toward children with whom they have no genetic connection, despite their having been the only father a child has known for its entire life. For example, in *Doran v. Doran* (2003), a man who had been rearing a child for 10 years was granted permission by the Pennsylvania Superior Court to remove himself entirely from the child's life.¹⁰ Regardless of whether a man is genetically connected to the child, a decision can be made at an early stage by the man that he would participate in rearing the child(ren). The ability to rescind this decision once a relationship has been established with child(ren) over the course of a year or more, regardless of the presence or absence of a genetic connection, is to neglect the interests of both the child and the man in continuing the relationship. If a man makes a clear decision to help rear particular children, he should not walk away from that commitment, even if it turns out that he is not genetically connected to the children. If we reject the idea that gamete vendors should be permitted to participate in the lives of their progeny because allowing it

⁹ Elizabeth Bartholet, "Guiding Principles for Picking Parents," in *Genetic Ties and the Family*, ed. Marth A. Rothstein, Thomas H. Murray, Gregory Kaebnick, and Mary Anderlik Majumder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 146.

¹⁰ Bartholet, "Guiding Principles," 133.

would disrupt children's lives, we should also acknowledge that permitting a father to dissolve an established parent-child relationship is likely to be at least as disruptive and injurious to both the child and the father as the introduction of an additional family member.

In the preceding discussion about the confusion surrounding the significance of intentions, I discussed the relatively recent convention that stipulates that individuals who donate or sell their gametes to fertility clinics for the purpose of assisting others in procreation have no obligations or rights toward progeny created via assisted reproductive technology (ART). The genetic connection between gamete vendors or donors and their progeny is trumped by the intentions and desires of those who seek assistance in procreation. This is not to suggest that the gamete donors/vendors find this problematic (in most cases); instead, the point is that although the genetic connection has most frequently been the trump card, there is this exception to that general rule.

The use of donor/vendor gametes is aimed primarily at ensuring that at least one member of the infertile couple will have a genetic connection to the offspring, presumably because genetic connections between parents and children are highly valued. However, as Bartholet points out the use of donor/vendor gametes amounts to disregarding the *child's* "need for generational continuity [by which she means a connection to forebears or descendants] while at the same time asserting their own."¹¹ Andrews also notes that it is a peculiar state of affairs when many divorced fathers are doing genetic tests to determine whether they are "really" fathers to their children while men whose wives use "donor" sperm consider themselves fathers of the resultant offspring.¹² These practices illustrate an inconsistent attitude toward genetic connections—they are treated as both important and unimportant at once.

Additionally, the fact that the child's genetic origins are often a closely guarded secret, even to the child, suggests an even more mysterious state of affairs wherein the *appearance* of genetic connections rather than actual genetic connections is desired. Granted, the creation of genetically related children is the primary goal of most attempts to procreate via assisted reproductive technology, but once it is established that this goal is not achievable, except in cases where attempts to adopt a child have failed, it is unclear why the prospective parents would opt to create a child that

¹¹ Bartholet, *Family Bonds*, 228.

¹² Lori B. Andrews, "Assisted Reproductive Technologies and the Challenge for Paternity Laws," in *Genetic Ties and the Family*, ed. Marth A. Rothstein, Thomas H. Murray, Gregory Kaebnick, and Mary Anderlik Majumder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 187-88.

lacks a genetic connection to them rather than adopt an existing child who would have no less of a genetic connection to them.

Gestational connections

While the main biological connection of interest has been the genetic connection between fathers and offspring, the separation of gestational connections from genetics or intent to rear raises additional questions about who counts as the "real" parent. Surrogates have been around for centuries, but the traditional way of becoming a surrogate was through insemination with the intended father's sperm. In today's world, however, a donor/vendor egg may be used by either a gestational surrogate or the intended mother. Hence, while the fact of giving birth used to be evidence of a woman's genetic connection to a child, this is no longer necessarily so. Moreover, even when the gestational and genetic connections to the child are both found in the same woman, disputes have arisen about whether these ties trump pre-conception intentions to transfer parental rights to, e.g., the genetic father and his partner, once the child is born. Probably the most infamous case was the 1988 *Baby M* case, where the first court ruled that the intended father, Mr. Stern, and his wife were the child's legal parents and that Ms. Whitehead, the surrogate—the genetic and gestational mother—had no legal claim to the child due to her pre-conception agreement with the Sterns. In this case, the genetic connection between Mr. Stern and the child, coupled with his and Ms. Stern's intention to rear the child, took precedence over the genetic and gestational connections between the child and Ms. Whitehead. This initial ruling, which was a first move toward allowing intentions to carry greater weight, was eventually overturned and Ms. Whitehead was given visitation rights. In a 1993 case, *Johnson v. Calvert*, Ms. Johnson agreed with the Calverts to gestate an embryo created with the Calverts' gametes and relinquish the child at birth. Ms. Johnson, who claimed to have bonded with the child during gestation, sued for custody. The court ruled in favor of honoring the initial intentions of the parties but also appealed to the significance of genetic connections between the Calverts and the child in the decision. It was not until the 1998 *Buzzanca* case that we see intent to rear as the *sole* basis for deciding legal parentage, but since then *intention* has continued to play a significant role in some decisions regarding legal parentage. For example, in the case of *K.M. v. E.G.*,¹³ it was decided that the birth mother was the only legal mother because her partner, the genetic mother, had

¹³ 13 Cal. Rptr. 3d 136, 146 (Cal. App. 1 Dist. 2004)

relinquished rights to the child through the egg donation process.¹⁴ The court used the donor consent form signed by the egg donor/intended mother and as evidence of having the usual intention of gamete vendors. This decision, however, was reversed by the California Supreme Court on the ground that the genetic connection, combined with the egg donor's intention to rear the children with her partner, was enough to establish parentage. Her intention put her on a different footing from an anonymous sperm/egg donor, who would not be held accountable with regard to the child.¹⁵

A further development—or twist—in cases involving gestational surrogates was the 2003 Maryland case, *In re Roberto d. B.*, both the gestational surrogate and the intended father, who was also the genetic father, were petitioning jointly to keep the birth mother's name off the twins' birth certificate. They argued that since she was neither the genetic mother nor the intended mother that she should not be on the birth certificate. Furthermore, it was pointed out that if the lack of a genetic connection between a man and a child can be used to escape legal parentage—something usually done because an intent to rear is *already* absent—the lack of a genetic connection between a woman and a child, coupled with the lack of intent to rear on the part of the gestational surrogate, should mean that she is not the legal mother of the child.

The following scenario, however, illustrates a problematic implication of this rationale. Imagine a woman who agrees to gestate an embryo created from her husband's sperm and a donor/vendor egg and join him in rearing a child created in this manner. Suppose that she changes her mind during pregnancy, because he has cheated on her or because they have decided to divorce. In any case, she no longer intends to rear the child once it is born and claims that since she is not genetically connected to the child, she is not its "real" mother and therefore has no legal (or moral) obligations toward it. Again, we confront the problem of shifting intentions and how they are to be incorporated into determinations about the relationship between particular adults and children in a world where such significance is attached to genetic connections. It is also reasonably clear that the offspring in such cases are probably the ones with the most to lose, even if they are not the only losers in such cases.

¹⁴ Sherry F. Colb, *When Sex Counts: Making Babies and Making Law* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2007), 70-71.

¹⁵ Colb, *When Sex Counts*.

The Root of the Confusion

There are at least two primary contributors to inconsistent attitudes regarding the relative importance of genetic connections and intentions discussed above. Other deeply entrenched beliefs may also contribute to inconsistent attitudes, but the emphasis on individual autonomy, which manifests in the claim that there is a right to procreate, and the widespread acceptance of genetic determinism appear to be dominant forces driving us into the whirlwind of inconsistencies.

There is a widespread assumption that individuals have a right to procreate—i.e., a right to create genetically related offspring. This assumption has been incorporated into documents such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion have the right to marry and found a family” (Article 16). Although some argue that a right to procreate is a fundamental right,¹⁶ others ground this right in other more basic rights, e.g., the right of self-determination or a right to privacy. Arguably, a right to privacy is itself grounded in a right of self-determination, so I will focus mainly on the notion of a right to procreate that is grounded in individual autonomy. For example, John Robertson, one of the few people who argues for a right to procreate, instead of merely assuming there is such a right, defines “procreative liberty” as “a right to reproduce or not *in the genetic sense*, which includes rearing or not, as intended by the parents...includ[ing] female gestation, whether or not there is a genetic connection to the child.”¹⁷ He also describes procreation as central to “personal identity, meaning and dignity.”¹⁸ Hence, Robertson’s account of “procreative liberty” is grounded in individual autonomy.

People’s reluctance to question whether individuals have a right to procreate is unsurprising, given our scandalous history of morally bankrupt efforts to regulate people’s procreative activities (e.g., 20th century eugenics programs in the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom). Many, including Robertson, view the right to procreate as a *prima facie* right and assert that the burden of proof is on those who would

¹⁶ See, e.g., John Lawrence Hill, “What Does it Mean to Be a Parent? The Claims of Biology as the Basis for Parental Rights,” *New York University Law Review* 66 (1991): 353-420.

¹⁷ John A. Robertson, *Children of Choice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 23.

¹⁸ Robertson, *Children of Choice*, 30.

deny that there is a right to procreate.¹⁹ However, despite the fact that societies have gone horribly wrong in past attempts to regulate procreation, the contemporary view that the primary consideration in the context of procreation should be the interests or desires of those who are attempting to procreate, fails to consider adequately the interests of those who are brought into existence by such actions.

Those who defend a right to procreate seem to confuse a right to engage in consensual sexual intercourse or collaborative attempts to procreate with a right to achieve certain results. Though individuals may have a right to cooperate with others in various ways, it does not follow from such a right that those individuals have a right to any particular consequences of those actions or a right to impact those who are not voluntary participants in the collaboration. The fact that there may be a right to *attempt* to procreate, which amounts to a right to have consensual sex or to collaborate with other willing parties in an attempt to procreate using assisted reproductive technologies without the interference of others, does not imply a right to bring another person into existence. To use Millum's barbershop quartet analogy,²⁰ one's right to form such a group with others does not entail a right to inflict our talent on an unwilling third party, much less bring a child into existence so that we will have an audience.

Whether there is a genuine right to procreate remains controversial, and whether a coherent account of a right to procreate can be developed remains to be seen. In addition to the general problems related to asserting a right to procreate, there is also the problem of asserting a right to something that might be impossible to obtain. Onora O'Neill, for example, has noted this problem with asserting a right to health, which is distinct from claiming that there is a right to an environment that provides the *opportunity* for normal health (e.g., right to clean water, basic

¹⁹ I have argued elsewhere that Robertson's account of procreative liberty is defective and so do not provide a detailed analysis of his position here. See Yvette Pearson, "Storks, Cabbage Patches, and the Right to Procreate," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 4, no. 2 (2007): p. 105-115.

²⁰ In response to an earlier version of this paper, wherein I denied the existence of a negative right to procreate, Joseph Millum pointed out that a person has a (negative) right to form a barber shop quartet with other willing parties and implied that there was no distinction between the negative right of two or more consenting parties to procreate and the right of four consenting individuals to form a barbershop quartet. While I agree that individuals have a right to engage in consensual sex or attempt to procreate through the use of assisted reproductive technologies, I do not think it follows that they have a right to the possible outcome of such actions—i.e., a genetically related child.

nourishment, etc.).²¹ There are many unfortunate cases where providing health-maximizing conditions will fail to result in a healthy individual. As O'Neill puts it, "since it will never be possible to guarantee health for all, there can be no obligation so to do...there can therefore be no right to health."²² Likewise it is problematic to assert that there is a right to create genetically related offspring or to acquire a child through adoption, goals that might be out of reach for some, even in the absence of morally problematic barriers such as the eugenic sterilization laws of the past.

In addition to the deeply entrenched assumption of a right to procreate, another pervasive assumption that contributes to the confused state of affairs regarding the relative importance of genetic connections and intentions in the context of procreation, is the assumption of genetic determinism (or genetic essentialism), which is the view that everything about us—our physical traits, personality, career choices, hobbies, etc.—is reducible to our genotype. James Watson, for example, claimed that "we used to think our fate was in the stars. Now we know, in large measure, our fate is in our genes."²³ Many others have echoed this sentiment in their discussions of genetic testing, cloning, genetic engineering, preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), or other issues related to procreation. On one level people seem to understand that procreation is a gamble and that the outcome of rearing a child is no less a mystery, but the overwhelming preference to procreate with one's own genetic material, even when strenuous effort is required, suggests that individuals believe that there is something more valuable or more predictable about using their own genetic material and rearing genetic progeny than, say, adopting an existing child.

This widespread embrace of genetic determinism has contributed to the importance placed on ensuring that there is a genetic connection to the children with whom one has established, or intends to establish, a parent-child relationship. The commitment to creating genetically related offspring has fostered the growth of a profitable assisted reproductive technology industry that has helped many circumvent their infertility and realize the goal of bringing genetically related children into the world. Ironically, however, this has led to the creation of children whose "generational continuity" is compromised (i.e., by the use of gametes from

²¹ Onora O'Neill, *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²² Onora O'Neill, *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics*, 79.

²³ Robert N. Proctor, "Resisting Reductionism from the Human Genome Project," in *Classic Works in Medical Ethics*, ed. Gregory Pence (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 342.

anonymous donors/vendors) by the procreators' quest to guarantee the same "generational continuity" for at least one of the prospective parents. Here we see a tension between the emphasis on individual autonomy and the embrace of genetic determinism. Moreover, we see a shift from valuing actual genetic connections between parents and offspring to valuing the mere *appearance* of genetic connections. We know only *that* people value genetic connections, not *why*, and people's reasons for valuing the veneer of genetic connections are even more mysterious.

As the preceding discussion suggests, the emphasis on individual autonomy eclipses other relevant considerations, such as the welfare or other interests (e.g., in "generational continuity") of the offspring. The focus on rights—or supposed rights—and interests or desires of adults dominates not only reproductive decision making but also decisions about who has parental obligations or entitlements toward children. How a particular adult values genetic connections to others will impact whether she will attempt to create a genetically related child, pursue a relationship with genetic progeny (e.g., created through anonymous gamete donation/sale or unintentionally), or continue or break off an established parent-child relationship. The interests of children, particularly when decisions whether to procreate are being made, are viewed as secondary, if they are considered at all.

Ultimately, it appears that the focus on the rights and interests of adults has obscured our view of obligations toward offspring. As a hedge against this, the focus of procreative decisions, as well as discussions about procreation, should shift to emphasize obligations toward offspring rather than the rights and interests of procreators. In addition this shift in perspective, it is likely that continuing advances in the field of genetics, coupled with an expanded effort to educate the public, will alter some of the beliefs and attitudes toward procreation and offspring that are currently influenced by the prevailing assumption of genetic determinism.