

# Feminism and Philosophy



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## INTRODUCTION: PARENTING AND PHILOSOPHY

Lauren Freeman

## ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

## ESSAYS

Serene Khader and Matthew Lindauer

*The “Daddy Dividend”: The Gender Division of Labor and Regression Towards Patriarchy*

Joseph A. Stramondo

*Gender, Disability, and the Violent Undercurrents of Parenting Inspiration Porn*

Saray Ayala-López

*(Philosophizing about) Gender-Open Children*

Quill Rebecca Kukla

*Taking Children’s Autonomy Seriously as a Parent*

Melissa Burchard

*Parenting in Trauma*

Amy Allen

*On Muddling Through*

Samantha Brennan

*Parenting, Feminism, and Academic Life: My Happy Story*

Carol Gray

*Bridging the Divide: Thoughts on Parenting as a Grad Student*

Leigh Viner

*Anthropologists from Mars*

Eli Kukla

*Raised in Philosophy*

Lauren Freeman

*Children, Parenting, and the Nature of Work*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Eva Feder Kittay: Learning from My Daughter: The Value and Care of Disabled Minds*

Reviewed by Lisa Tessman

*Benjamin R. Sherman and Stacey Goguen, eds.: Overcoming Epistemic Injustice: Social and Psychological Perspectives*

Reviewed by Claire A. Lockard

*Sophie Lewis: Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*

Reviewed by Jina Fast

*Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger: Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*

Reviewed by Kathryn Lafferty-Danner

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## CONTRIBUTORS



APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Feminism and Philosophy

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LAUREN FREEMAN, EDITOR

VOLUME 19 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING 2020

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## INTRODUCTION: PARENTING AND PHILOSOPHY

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Several years ago, I attended a small conference for women in philosophy. One week before the conference, I learned that I was pregnant with my second child. Given that I had an almost two-year-old, another on the way, and that I had just completed my first year in a tenure-track job, I was excited to see a panel on the program called (something like) "Philosophy and Motherhood." I showed up enthusiastically, pen in hand, notebook splayed, eager to write down all of the tips that were going to be offered on how to manage and balance children and a promising career (not to mention everything else).

But I was not so excited to learn that the unanimous—and, quite frankly, surprising—conclusion from all of the participants on the panel was that it was more or less impossible to achieve the trifecta of success in philosophy, parenthood, and (even minimal) happiness. One panelist spoke about how she'd had children well before beginning graduate school and how she was more or less absent during their early childhood in order to finish her degree in a timely manner and to be taken seriously in her department. Another panelist said that she'd had children soon after securing a tenure-track job, and that it was so expensive to afford childcare (in the NY area), and so difficult to balance her job and her family life while scrambling to deal with childcare, that even though she didn't regret having children *per se*, she certainly didn't seem to be happy about everything she'd had to sacrifice in order to have them. A third panelist who'd had children during graduate school said, outright, that she regretted that decision, if not the decision to have children at all.

The conclusion I drew was that if you have children as an academic, you regret it, either entirely, or for having them before tenure. But even if you don't come to regret your decision, it's still impossible to succeed at research, have a family, and be happy. Needless to say, as someone who had one child, was newly pregnant, and was already nervous about bringing a second child into our family, I left the panel and the conference feeling downtrodden, disappointed, and fearful for what my future had in store for me and my partner.

But, as I've come to see six years later, what the panelists described on that day is not the only outcome of being a parent and a philosopher, nor should it be the only or the dominant narrative floating around. In retrospect, it was this panel, and the very negative picture it painted, that was the initial impetus for conceiving of the current issue.

So far, my own experience as a parent has been positive. I say this with full acknowledgment and awareness of all of my many privileges. I had my son (who is now almost eight) while I was just about to begin the third of a three-year limited-term teaching job in Montreal, Quebec, in Canada. Even though it was not a permanent job, because Quebec has the most generous parental leave policy of any province in Canada, I still received a full year of parental leave along with 100 percent of my salary (which, as far as I'm concerned, should be the norm everywhere). Because of this, we were able to move as a family to the city where my partner had secured a job for the year. It was during this year that I landed a tenure-track job after four years on the market. (Note: doing a series of more than five on-campus interviews while nursing, and leaving a six-month-old at home with his dad (who was working full time, during the winter of several "Snowpocalypses" on the east coast which caused many flight delays and some canceled flights which caused me to stay away from them for longer than planned) required lots of juggling, lots of paid childcare, lots of requested accommodations from search committees, and several embarrassing and awkward moments pumping milk during my campus visits. Though being on the job market while nursing an infant is not ideal, it is certainly possible and I am happy to report that all of the departments where I interviewed were as understanding and accommodating of all of my requests as they possibly could have been. This is a point that needs to be broadcasted loudly, since every department far exceeded my expectations.)

When my daughter was born a year and a half into my tenure-track job, not surprisingly, things were not as easy parental-leave wise as they were in Canada, since I was then living in the United States and working at a large state school with no good parental leave policy of which to speak. But with tremendous and relentless effort and negotiation, I did manage to secure a leave with which I was completely happy. With the input and savviness of colleagues who had successfully navigated this terrain before and who served as invaluable mentors (thanks, Tracy K.!) and a remarkable amount of creative thinking on the part of my chair at the time (thanks, Bob K.!), I ended up tweaking my annual work plan by ramping up my research and service duties so that I did not have to teach for an entire semester. With this time off teaching, combined with the summer months

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following that semester, I did not go back to teaching until my daughter was eight months old. Another ingredient in the mix then and now is a family-friendly department and current chair (shout out to David O.!), which makes an enormous difference when scheduling classes, department meetings, and other obligations.

Though we live in a city with no family anywhere close by, my parents and my partner's parents are still very involved in the lives of our children and help us in whatever ways they can. But the geographic distance means that we have no family on whom we can rely or depend for extra or emergency childcare—for snow days, sick days, or children's (countless) school breaks that do not align with our work calendars. This means that we've spent and continue to spend rather alarming amounts of money on extra childcare. But, as seems to be common in the lives of working parents in general, and of philosophers in particular—see the narratives in this issue by Samantha Brennan and Amy Allen—this is often a necessary tactic in order to get it all done (again, a huge privilege that we are able to afford this extra childcare—thanks to Kristen, Grace, Rachel, and Gabby for saving us more times than I can count!). Most of all, and in addition to the other privileges I've just mentioned, what has been a necessary ingredient in being able to juggle it all is that I have an incredibly devoted and involved partner (also a philosophy professor) who is also entirely committed to feminist ideals of child-raising and to an equal division of household and family responsibilities.

The topic of parenting and philosophy is not discussed enough in any formal way. As an antidote to the panel I mentioned above—which painted a rather grim picture of motherhood/parenthood and philosophy, to say the least—I conceived of this issue as a way of broadcasting a variety of diverse narratives of success. In the early stages of thinking about the issue, I made an interesting observation, namely, that when I approached several potential contributors, there was a real and explicit reluctance (a) to think of themselves as successes (though the people I have in mind are all full professors and/or deans, and all have three or more children) and (b) to tell their stories in a way that centers their success. In varying ways, they all feared, in the words of one of the philosophers who I asked to contribute, “coming across as an asshole.” The fact that narratives of success in parenting and philosophy are not the norm in the field, combined with the fact that people who are successful are hesitant and sometimes even ashamed to tell their stories, made me even more persistent in convincing them to contribute.

Some did, some did not.

Before giving a sneak preview of what you'll find in this issue, a few caveats are in order. First, I intentionally did not want to call this issue “*Motherhood and Philosophy*.” Many issues surrounding children and careers focus on women, and there are good reasons for this—reasons that are rooted in systemic misogyny, sexism, patriarchy, and the myriad ways in which women have been and continue to be systematically discriminated against with regards to their reproductive choices (or, lack thereof), pregnancy,

childbirth, raising children, and doubly so when these issues are combined with their choice to pursue careers. In this issue, I wanted to feature diverse philosophers who are mothers, but also fathers, and parents of all sexes and genders and to provide them with a venue in which to share their stories. Focusing on women can be helpful, but it can also eclipse the stories of other primary caregivers who do not identify as women. Focusing on parenting more generally acknowledges that trans and non-binary folks also face specific barriers in their parenting journeys. Saray Ayala-Lopez's contribution, for example, is not only written from the perspective of someone raising a child as a non-binary person and parent, but it also defends the choice of raising a gender-open child.

Second, and more specifically, fatherhood and success in philosophy is not spoken of nearly enough (if at all) in the way that it should be, by which I mean fathers who are explicitly committed to feminist ideals of parenting. I am sorry that I do not have more contributions from fathers, but I am very grateful for the words and stories of Joseph A. Stramondo and Matthew Lindauer (Lindauer co-wrote his contribution to the issue with his partner, Serene Khader). Both of these contributions underscore what Khader and Lindauer call the “daddy dividend,” namely, the ways in which even in relationships committed to feminist ideals of parenting and equal division of household labor, fathers are still benefiting from having to do far less than their partners (in the eyes of the public) to be considered superlative parents.

This volume is robust, but not comprehensive. I hope that you enjoy the many voices, perspectives, and stories that you read in what follows. Let me give you a small taste of what's to come.

Serene Khader and Matthew Lindauer's contribution, “**The 'Daddy Dividend': The Gender Division of Labor and Regression Towards Patriarchy,**” articulates something that, I think, so many of us have experienced and spoken about with one another, yet that I've never seen articulated so perfectly and eloquently. They begin with an observation, namely, that many well-meaning gestures, comments, and responses to their goal of egalitarian, feminist-informed parenting have ended up reinforcing the very habits that they've wanted to guard against. In order to explain this phenomenon, they coin the term “daddy dividend,” which refers to the following phenomenon: while fathers tend to be praised for doing, minimally, what any parent would be expected to do (i.e., for changing a diaper, talking to their baby, or even just holding their baby), mothers are regularly scolded in public by strangers who point out, unsolicited, for example, that their baby is hungry, cold, gassy, or has a runny nose. Khader and Lindauer show how the daddy dividend is pernicious, both in the short- and in the long-term. They argue, “[i]n praising fathers for doing what is simply required of mothers, strangers reinforce the attitude in men that the fatherly duties assigned to them by the traditional gender division of labor are all that should be expected of them.” Khader and Lindauer's essay goes on to focus on three lessons about distributing household work that they've learned from conceptualizing the gender division of labor in parenting: (i) that social rewards for

fathers can exacerbate the tendency of women to engage in shadow labor, (ii) that gender socialization faces would-be egalitarian households with significant startup and maintenance costs, and (iii) that striving for equality may not actually be the best way to achieve equality.

Joseph A. Stramondo's narrative essay, "**Gender, Disability, and the Violent Undercurrents of Parenting Inspiration Porn**," illustrates how the daddy dividend carries over into the experience of parenting while disabled. Specifically, he brings an intersectional lens to the discussion by considering how the daddy dividend is combined, in his experience, with being objectified as "inspiration porn," a term coined by Stella Young, to designate instances when disabled people are framed as inspirational merely because of the presence of disability. Stramondo explains: "The problem of inspiration porn is that it gives voice to the very low expectations the world has for disabled people. By treating the completion of ordinary tasks as if they were monumental accomplishments, it shows just how incompetent people assume we are. For most disabled people, this experience is pervasive." Yet, as Stramondo goes on to discuss, experiencing the objectification of inspiration porn is not universal. For example, his partner, Leah, a cisgender disabled woman, has never had to contend with it. Whereas Stramondo is often considered to be father of the year by strangers, simply for existing as a disabled father, Leah is disparaged for being a disabled mother. His essay goes on to consider the ableist presumption that disabled parents are inherently inadequate parents and some of the ways in which this presumption is not only offensive, but dangerous.

Saray Ayala-López's essay, "**(Philosophizing about) Gender-Open Children**," considers another kind of non-normative parenting, namely, the decision to raise a gender-open child. Raising a gender-open child means that parents do not reveal the gender of their child, or better, reject the assumption that their baby/child already has a gender. This means that when caring for a gender-open baby, parents don't use binary gender pronouns (like "she" or "he") to refer to their child; rather, you use "they" singular; and when introducing their baby, they do so as a human who doesn't have a gender yet. It also means that they don't reveal their baby's genital status, which most people assume to be straightforwardly associated with gender and the only factor in determining one's sex (both false). To some, raising a gender-open child might seem like an odd (or even a harmful) move. But Ayala-López questions these assumptions. In order to do so, they envision three conceptual spaces in which to philosophize on this matter.

The first is the space of parents, in which they respond to what they've called the Activism Olympics objection, which questions whether gender-open parenting is just a way for parents to expand their activism, perhaps even at the expense of their child. The second space is the space of children, where Ayala-López responds to the questions of how we can be sure that being raised gender open is good for the child; how not being assigned a (binary) gender can also be good for the child; and whether the absence of an assigned gender at birth has its own set of problems: taken together, what they call the Missing Identity objection.

Third, they engage the space of those who theorize about gender-open children. There, they are forthright about the ways in which their decision to raise their child gender-open is not alien to the academic work they've done on sex and gender. While being related to their work seems to give their parenting decision a kind of academic street cred, they nevertheless want to keep their theorizing in check. Ayala-López firmly believes that when theorizing about other people's identities, there are certain ethical guidelines which must be made clear to ourselves, both as individual researchers and as a society. One of these guidelines requires us to answer the question of why we are interested in researching the questions we do. They conclude by developing some of the ethical considerations that should guide our philosophizing about other peoples' identities. Given various debacles that have plagued our discipline in the past few years surrounding theorizing about people's identities, we ought to take seriously Ayala-López's guidance on this matter, for these ethical guides can be generalized beyond the specific question of raising gender-open children. I hope that more people take heed and recognize that philosophizing about identities is a very different matter—with profoundly different consequences—than philosophizing about abstract concepts. People's lives are on the line. I very much look forward to Ayala-López's future work on this topic, since there is clearly far more to be said on this matter.

Quill Rebecca Kukla's paper, "**Taking Children's Autonomy Seriously as a Parent**," considers the culture of parenting older children as they transition into adulthood. This paper is an important follow-up to their 2005 book, *Mass Hysteria*, which argued that we exist within the strong grip of a damaging cultural myth that dictates that being a good mother requires us to remove the boundaries between mother and infant. This myth still seems to be just as true today as it was fifteen years ago. Within the context of their own eighteen-year-old child (who is also a contributor to this issue!), Kukla has become interested in another agency- and boundary-obliterating parenting mythology. As a point of departure for their project, they assert that "we fundamentally fail to respect the basic autonomy rights that children have as people, and indeed that we equate 'good parenting' with severe violations of these autonomy rights. We accept and even approve of subjugating children to their parents' will in ways that would be shocking if enacted against other sorts of people." Within this context, they argue for "a radical reorientation of how we think about children's autonomy and parents' duties to enable and respect it" with the goal of underscoring what they take to be profoundly wrong with the way that we tend to generally understand parenting and its goals.

Kukla calls attention to a myriad of ways in which we as a society systematically undermine children, in ways that tend to be sidestepped, denied, or outright ignored in mainstream discussions about parenting: for example, that we tend not to actually see children as people (as in, they are considered only to be partial people, or on-their-way-to-being people); that we tend to gaslight children and not think that this is morally wrong; that as parents, we often restrict where children can go and what they can do even when there is no evidence-based argument for doing so.

In sum, as they write, “we violate all of the ground-level rules we normally recognize for how to treat people as self-determining agents with dignity.” Kukla concludes by introducing a very different framework for engaging with children, one guided by the idea that insofar as children are people, we have a moral duty to inhibit their autonomy and invade their privacy as little as possible.

In her essay “**Parenting in Trauma**,” Melissa Burchard takes as her point of departure the claim that if we believe and continue to assert that philosophy is important for understanding reality, the world we live in, and our experiences within it, then serious discussions and engagement with issues of parenting and childrearing is important for *philosophy* as a discipline. She has come to believe this based on her own very difficult experience of parenting, which began fifteen years ago when she and her partner adopted a four- and nine-year-old from foster care, both of whom had been traumatized in multiple ways, by various people in their lives, over an extended period of time. Burchard’s parenting and philosophical interests have informed one another: as a philosopher-mother, she realized that she needed a philosophy of trauma—and more specifically, one that paid attention to the developmental trauma of children who have been traumatized under circumstances like her children—but that such a thing was almost entirely lacking in the philosophical literature. Burchard has recently published a book on this topic, *Philosophical Reflections on Mother in Trauma* (Routledge 2018), which is a more comprehensive account of the issues she considers here. What she offers here are some implications of trauma for parenting and philosophical understanding.

Specifically, Burchard discusses the ways that trauma affects basic interactions of children in various stages of development, both psychologically and physiologically and the various implications of trauma that philosophy needs to take seriously. Her argument is this: “if infants and children do not get the proper kinds of interactions, they do not develop certain relational abilities, which may prevent them from forming satisfying, mutually trusting relationships throughout their lives.” Generally, such a line of thinking is something feminist philosophers have taken seriously for a while, though focus has not been directed to children. But Burchard wants uptake for this claim beyond feminist circles. She goes on to discuss trauma’s effects on children’s ability to play—what she calls “post-trauma play”—and some of the surprising and difficult things she learned from her own kids that cast into relief what we tend to take for granted. For instance, she questions the assumption that it is always easy for children to engage in imaginative and free play and considers how trauma in early childhood compromises this capacity. Burchard also discusses trauma’s effect on children’s sense of reality and the various ways in which her children were not living in the same world or inhabiting the same reality as her and her partner: in the world of her children and of so many children who have endured early childhood trauma, parents are not people to whom to turn for love and nurturing; rather, parents are people, first and foremost, to be feared (in addition to be loved and depended upon). Before concluding, Burchard considers some of the implications that parenting children who have experienced trauma has

for social, political, and moral philosophy, among others, in particular that it can help us articulate the wrongs of oppressions or oppressive actions. Finally, she considers the upshot of her discussion for considering the good life and how even a basic conception of a good life may be challenging when children have been severely traumatized, especially if that trauma has affected or disrupted their developmental processes.

Amy Allen’s narrative, “**On Muddling Through**,” chronicles how she found success both as an academic and as a mother. I do not want to downplay the success part of her narrative; Amy, on the other hand, would like to focus on all of the ways that the stars have aligned throughout her career to make her decision to have four children commensurate with eventually becoming a full professor and now chair of a robust department with a PhD program, in addition to the author and editor of many books. One of the ways in which Allen’s and Samantha Brennan’s narratives overlap nicely is that while not ignoring the daily difficulties of parenting (young and older children) while working full time, they both recognize that of all careers, academia is probably one of the friendliest toward parents, in the sense that for the most part, as a full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty member, it offers us greater autonomy (and oftentimes flexibility) over one’s work schedule (this is obviously not so for adjunct teaching). Allen still underscores the myriad structural problems that make it difficult to juggle everything, including, but not limited to the fact that there is no mandatory paid parental leave in the United States; no universal, affordable daycare system; and the fact that many people live far away from their extended family. As a result, her words of wisdom are that until the structural problems (of oppression) are resolved, at best we can hope to muddle through it all, where admittedly, having more privilege helps. But in this muddling through, Allen shares some of the strategies that have been particularly helpful to her over the years and still.

As is clear from the title of Samantha Brennan’s narrative, “**Parenting, Feminism, and Academic Life: My Happy Story**,” her decision to have three children toward the very beginning of her career (beginning, that is, in graduate school) has resulted in a happy story (though obviously the story is still evolving). Brennan is the Dean of the College of Arts and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guelph in Canada. In the last few years, she co-founded and co-edited *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, an online, open access journal; she also founded a very successful fitness blog that she still runs and that also resulted in a popular book called *Fit at Mid-Life: A Feminist Fitness Journey* (<https://greystonebooks.com/products/fit-at-mid-life>). Last year, she ended her three-year term as a member of the Canadian Philosophical Association executive (Vice-President, President, and Past President). While not doing academic things, she also rides her bike long distances, goes back country canoe camping, and races small sailboats. Within the context of such a rich life in which she also has close relationships with her three adult children (ages twenty-one, twenty-three, and twenty-seven), she provides the reader with ten thoughts on what has worked for her and has enabled her to achieve all of her many successes.

Carol Gray’s contribution, “**Bridging the Divide: Thoughts on Parenting as a Grad Student**,” shares some important insights about parenting while a grad student. Gray had a career as a lawyer before deciding to do a PhD in political science. At that time, her son was nine; he’s now fifteen. She discusses how she has managed to find the time to be with him (even if it means combining work and play); how bringing him to school with her has been a rewarding and enriching experience for both of them (even if it was done out of necessity); how she has always prioritized family activities and has scheduled classes around family time (even if it’s meant that she has not always taken the classes that most interested her); and, importantly, how she always makes it up to her son when her school conflicts with a family commitment. A perspective on parenting while a grad student is one that I really wanted to include in this issue, since it is fairly common and, again, one that is not discussed nearly enough.

Leigh Viner’s contribution, “**Anthropologists from Mars**,” discusses her experiences single-parenting her now grown son (who, maybe not coincidentally, was a philosophy major in university). She thinks of this experience as being like an anthropologist from Mars, with him as her assistant. She tells us how the philosophers who have had the biggest impact on her—philosophers who value art, play, freedom, dignity, and openness—have also been the ones that have shaped her parenting and how it was, in fact, her son who led her to feminism. Her message is simple, namely, that if we are doing it right, then “we learn at least as much from our children and from our students as they do from us.”

Speaking of philosophy-parents and philosophy-sons, the penultimate contribution to the issue is by the son of another philosopher included in the newsletter, namely, Eli Kukla (Quill Rebecca Kukla’s son), who discusses what it’s been like to be raised by philosophers. I’m excited to be including in this issue the perspective of a child of philosophers—one that we definitely don’t hear enough of. What excites me most about including these two contributions side-by-side is that much of what Quill Kukla discusses in their article from a theoretical and normative perspective (i.e., how we should treat children, the virtues of actually respecting the autonomy of children, even if our society fails to see them as full people) is exemplified in Eli Kukla’s thoughts and is visible in his achievements and robust philosophical outlook and perspectives. What I mean is that Quill Kukla has not only presented an argument in favor of a certain type of parenting; in Eli Kukla, we have proof, in the flesh, that the type of parenting they are advocating works!

“**Raised in Philosophy**” discusses what it’s like to be what Eli Kukla calls a “pure-bred philosophers’ kid,” meaning that both of his parents and his grandfather are philosophers. Eli Kukla gives us a number of examples of the ways in which his philosophical upbringing has shaped who he is today and how having been immersed in philosophy “has affected seemingly every aspect of [his] life and personality.” As Eli Kukla writes and, later, expands upon, “Most people, at some point in their lives, reach a point where they question many of their assumptions about life. People question religion, sexuality, monogamy, traditional family structures,

gender, et cetera. But for me, being raised by philosophers, I never started out with any of these assumptions to begin with.” Ultimately, seeing the profession through the eyes of someone who has grown up immersed within it, Eli Kukla’s essay reminds us of many of the wonderful things about the profession, which (depending on the day, the scandal, etc.) tend to be easy to forget.

Finally, I wrote a short narrative piece for this issue, entitled “**Children, Parenting, and the Nature of Work**,” where I share some feminist observations from my recent experience of doing philosophy with children.

In addition to the contributions just mentioned, in this issue you will find the following book reviews: Lisa Tessman’s review of Eva Feder Kittay’s *Learning from My Daughter: The Value and Care of Disabled Minds*, Claire A. Lockard’s review of *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice: Social and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Benjamin R. Sherman and Stacey Goguen, Jina Fast’s review of Sophie Lewis’s *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*, and Kathryn Lafferty-Danner’s review of Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger’s *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*.

I am so grateful to all of the authors in this issue. It’s been a really fun, fulfilling, and illuminating issue to put together. I’m also grateful to Brian Robinson and Sabrina Little for their help reviewing articles. Finally, I am forever grateful to my mentor and friend (and also Chair of the APA Committee on the Status of Women) Kate Norlock for her editorial advice on this issue.

I hope that you enjoy this issue!

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## ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

The *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of newsletter articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

**1. Purpose:** The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The newsletter contains discussions of

recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor or send four copies of essays via regular mail. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

**2. Book Reviews and Reviewers:** If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the newsletter, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are always seeking new book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the editor, Lauren Freeman ([lauren.freeman@louisville.edu](mailto:lauren.freeman@louisville.edu)), a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

**3. Where to Send Things:** Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Dr. Lauren Freeman, University of Louisville, [lauren.freeman@louisville.edu](mailto:lauren.freeman@louisville.edu).

**4. Submission Deadlines:** Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

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## ESSAYS

### *The “Daddy Dividend:” The Gender Division of Labor and Regression Towards Patriarchy*

Serene Khader and Matthew Lindauer  
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER AND BROOKLYN COLLEGE

When we welcomed our baby last winter, there were some things everyone seemed to want to know. Was she sleeping? How were we feeding her? What kind of casserole did we want? But, really, was she sleeping?

One of the biggest challenges we faced was one that no one asked about: deciding how we would divide parenting and household labor. That no one asked about it, of course, did not mean that our division of labor was wholly private. We knew from feminist scholarship, and from the surprising amount of work it had taken to divide household labor in an egalitarian way when we were childless, that entrenched social inequalities would rear their heads in our home. We were less prepared, however, for the extent to which many well-meaning gestures, including ones that are intended to promote egalitarianism, on later reflection, would turn out to reinforce habits we wanted to guard against.

We coined the term “daddy dividend”<sup>1</sup> on one of the many days a stranger on the subway told Matt (a white man) that he was the “best daddy ever.” The thing he had done to receive this accolade was to wear his baby in a carrier, and perhaps not seem utterly miserable doing so. By contrast, Serene (a brown woman) has never been told by a stranger that she’s the best mom ever, or even a decent one. It’s difficult to disaggregate the effects of race and gender in our case, as we know that women of color are widely perceived as inferior mothers.<sup>2</sup> In fact, because our baby has lighter skin than Serene does, sometimes people do not perceive Serene as her mother at all.

The daddy dividend is a cluster of gestures—again, well-meaning in many cases—that negatively tax the social esteem of men when they publicly perform basic parental duties: taking their children places, feeding them, changing their diapers, talking to them, and so on. It is the corollary of the positive tax on moms for their public parenting; moms are regularly scolded by strangers stating confidently (sometimes indignantly!) that their baby is hungry, cold, gassy, or has a runny nose. Of course, this scolding may take on different tones, intensities, and social meanings depending on the mother’s race, class, sexuality, ability, and other social inequalities, and so may the compliments given to fathers.<sup>3</sup> But our experience has been that momming in public carries a cost; dadding in public carries a benefit.

We do not wish to suggest that the gender division of childcare is sustained entirely, or even primarily, by such microcompliments and microaggressions.<sup>4</sup> However, we have found it helpful to think of the traditional gender division of labor in parenting as a social practice that is supported, in part, by norms governing the assignment of esteem, visibility, and value. In what follows, we will focus on three further lessons about distributing household work that we have learned from conceptualizing the gender division of labor in this way: that social rewards for fathers can exacerbate the tendency of women to engage in shadow labor, that gender socialization faces would-be egalitarian households with significant startup and maintenance costs, and that striving for equality may not be the best way to achieve equality.

Dividing childcare and household labor is not a snapshot in time, even if selfies with the kids claim otherwise. It is an ongoing practice that is impacted by our society’s preexisting norms and expectations around what fathers and mothers are expected to do. To borrow H. L. A. Hart’s term, it is possible to take the “internal point of view”<sup>5</sup> on the traditional gender division of labor, wherein participants accept these norms and govern their behavior accordingly. This can be done through direct, self-conscious action—openly declaring “I will not wash the dishes, it’s not a man’s job!”—or through more subtle means—thinking to oneself, “I played with the baby for twenty minutes, so that counts for at least twenty minutes of cleaning the dishes. Back to reading.” The internal point of view on the traditional gender division of labor has it that mothers and fathers bear distinct parenting and household duties. Any engagement by fathers in the duties associated with mothering is therefore supererogatory—beyond the call of

fatherly duty. Hence, the same behavior is praiseworthy for one in virtue of being more than what they are required to do—for the other, it is middling at best. For a mother answering a work call while pushing the stroller, negative comments are required to remind her of the duties the practice prescribes her. She had better not be getting the idea that she should instead adopt the external point of view on the practice, the position of an observer that does not accept or even rejects its norms.

One might be forgiven for thinking that in offering Matt the daddy dividend strangers encourage him to engage more in the activities associated with mothering. But this misses the centrality of obligation and supererogation to the gender division of labor. In praising fathers for doing what is simply required of mothers, strangers reinforce the attitude in men that the fatherly duties assigned to them by the traditional gender division of labor are all that should be expected of them. Picking out an action for praise expresses the judgment that it is not just what you should be doing—it would be weird to praise someone for brushing their teeth, or wearing shoes in public. But it is common to give men the daddy dividend, in the form of public praise, for performing actions that are just as common and expected for mothers.

By seeing the gender division of labor as a practice, the further insight follows that any egalitarian revision to it will also be a practice, and one that is affected by its predecessor. That is to say, we cannot ignore the fact that partners trying to set up an egalitarian gender division of labor need vigilance and ongoing carefulness if they wish to avoid slipping back into the package of patriarchal norms that the inherited practice entailed. As the daddy dividend illustrates, there are signs all around pulling us back towards the old way of doing things.

Moreover, rewarding men for engaging in high-visibility parenting encourages women to engage in low-visibility parenting, or, as it is often called “shadow labor.”<sup>6</sup> As most parents know, most of the important labor of parenting is not done in public. Much of the most physically and cognitively demanding labor associated with parenting is done outside of the jaunt in the park or down the street for coffee—it’s in the middle of the night, or in one’s vanishingly small leisure time. The daddy dividend encourages men to invest in public parenting. Since they are likely to take other men’s behavior and not equality as the relevant baseline,<sup>7</sup> and they know that men who engage in high-visibility parenting are doing more than other men,<sup>8</sup> the daddy dividend encourages women to shift to less visible, and often more taxing, labor that still needs to be done.<sup>9</sup> This includes the more mundane, or even yucky, elements of parenting (cleaning up the food the baby has thrown all over the kitchen) and the much-discussed “cognitive load,” which is typically code for the managerial tasks associated with mothering (making sure that a baby has her next size of clothing, ensuring that paid childcare arrangements are made, keeping the household’s schedule, making doctor’s appointments, and so on).

Of course, the perception that men’s engagement in feminized parenting tasks is supererogatory does not

begin with the daddy dividend. It begins in childhood socialization, and thinking of parenting as a practice through which value is assigned to tasks has also helped us to think through what it means to directly address the role of this socialization. Boys are generally socially habituated not just not to *think* about planning for the care work of babies, but also not to learn the skills associated with doing so. The perception that women are naturally better at this work also works to invisibilize the mechanisms by which women and boys acquire these skills, and to discourage men and boys from bothering to acquire them—or parents from bothering to teach them. This means that the gender division of labor in parenting in a mixed-gender couple is usually one where women have an advantage with respect to the relevant skills.

Thinking of socialization as producing *specialization* rather than just stereotypes has helped us think more concretely about what is involved in changing its inegalitarian effects. We know that it is easy and efficient (in some sense, at least) to do what we already specialize in. This means that there are startup costs for mixed-gender couples trying to achieve equality. Some of these costs fall on men, who need to learn, but it is important to recognize that the costs are often borne by women who have to teach them. For instance, Matt has taken up the task of contacting relatives for used clothing and tracking whether our daughter’s current clothing fits her. But for this to happen, Serene had to schedule a lesson on arranging and sorting clothing and anticipating future clothing needs.

Our third and last point here follows from the fact that, given all of this, the ongoing influence of the gender division of labor is more likely to produce inegalitarian than egalitarian outcomes. For this reason, aiming at equality may not be the appropriate framing to guide men’s action. Like any form of praise, the daddy dividend can be seductive, and we aren’t recommending confronting well-meaning individuals when such praise is being offered (they mean well, and there are a lot of people who might feel threatened—not good, especially when your kids are around). If you are a dad who really wants to do something about the daddy dividend, it’s probably also a bad idea to heap further internal praise on yourself for noticing it. When you’re faced with such a system of social rewards, the better strategy, we believe, is to overcompensate in some domains of household labor. Perhaps egalitarian men should do “more” of the cleaning, diaper-changing, laundry, clothing turnover and organization, and other unappealing tasks in the household. Because the perception that a man is doing “more,” when so much in our society is telling him that he has done more than his share already, is likely to just be a reflection that things are a little bit closer to equality.

Just as people’s selfies tell us little about whether they’re actually happy and living well, men’s selfies with their children tell us little about whether they are parenting and partnering well. By shifting our focus on snapshots to sustained parenting practices, we may just be less likely to confuse the two. And as a final note, if you are worried that what we have said seems too justice-oriented or juridical for such a personal area of one’s life, we’d like to invite you to think about our points in terms of love. If you love your

partner, what do you really owe to them? It's probably not what an outmoded, patriarchal social practice says you do.

#### NOTES

1. The phrase "daddy dividend" has, unsurprisingly, been used by others, but not in the way that we do here, and sometimes in ways that are at odds with our commitments. For instance, Douglas Abrams describes a "daddy dividend" that children supposedly receive for having an involved father's presence in their lives ("The Daddy Dividend," *Psychology Today*, March/April 2002). As feminists and egalitarians, we have concerns about this sort of argument, but discussing them is beyond the scope of this brief article. Others use the term to describe a career boost that fathers seem to receive relative to fatherless men (see, e.g., <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/01/the-daddy-track/355746/>).
2. This stereotyping is particularly pronounced and well documented in the case of Black women. For a discussion of stereotypes of Black motherhood, such as the association of Black women with unwed motherhood, excessive sexual desire that prevents virtue, and "welfare queens," see Dorothy Roberts, "Racism and Patriarchy and the Meaning of Black Motherhood," [https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1594&context=faculty\\_scholarship](https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1594&context=faculty_scholarship).
3. See Joe Stramondo's piece in this newsletter, "Gender, Disability, and the Violent Undercurrents of Parenting Inspiration Porn," for a discussion of how a context of disability oppression transforms the daddy dividend into an occasion for inspiration porn when the dads in question have visible disabilities.
4. See Ann Cudd's *Analyzing Oppression* (Oxford University Press, 2002) for an analysis of how social structures work to force women to "choose" to engage in disproportionate caregiving.
5. H. L. A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). We are borrowing and using this term, as well as the "external point of view," for our distinctive purposes here, which vary considerably from Hart's own in developing a theory of law.
6. Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (New York: Maryon Boyers, 2016).
7. Deborah Rhode, *Speaking of Sex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
8. This could be a form of moral self-licensing. See Benoît Monin and Dale T. Miller, "Moral Credentials and the Expression of Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, no. 1 (2001): 33–43.
9. A recent study by Musick, Meier, and Flood finds that men disproportionately participate in the "fun" parenting tasks, like playing sports and reading books. "How Parents Fare," *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 5 (2016): 1061–95.

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## *Gender, Disability, and the Violent Undercurrents of Parenting Inspiration Porn*

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Her bright purple jacket, pink tights, silver tutu, and honey-colored hair present a sharp contrast to my black coat, black pants, black beard, and black power wheelchair, as we zoom down the sidewalk together, chatting away. She first learned to ride on my chair when she was eighteen months old. We started in the safety of the manicured grounds of our apartment complex and slowly expanded our range to the shopping center down the block and, eventually, the trolley system that opened nearly the entire city to our adventures. At first, I kept a bag of fruit snacks in my pocket to use for bribes when something was just too interesting to

keep her toddler hands off of, but I haven't had to use that trick in several months now. Having her constant stream of questions answered seems reward enough to keep her perched on my lap. She is my companion nearly every time I leave the house with a destination other than my office, my classroom, or the airport.

This Saturday morning, we are running an errand: picking up some items her mom needs from the pharmacy. There is a small group of people loitering by the entrance and I can immediately tell they want to say something to us. "Hey man, look at you! Is that your little girl? You're a great dad! You're father of the year!" One of them tries to give me a high five as we roll past, but my hands are occupied; one is on my chair's joystick and the other clutches Hazel loosely to help her balance. She ignores them completely and I mutter some nicety. Neither of us want to interrupt our trajectory into the store. I'm thinking I might want a bottled ice coffee to help me keep up with her and her brother all day and she has already been practicing the tone she will use to convince me to buy her some chocolate at 10 a.m.

Maybe we appear rude to an outsider, spurning their words of encouragement in our haste to acquire a jar of acetaminophen. The truth is that I'm quite proud of Hazel's intuitive ability to recognize and, when appropriate, shrug off ableism. It was, in fact, ableism we were encountering.

In particular, we were being used as real life "inspiration porn." Stella Young coined this term to designate instances when disabled people are framed as inspirational merely because of the presence of disability: "I use the term porn deliberately, because they objectify one group of people for the benefit of another group of people. So, in this case, we're objectifying disabled people for the benefit of non-disabled people. The purpose of these images is to inspire you, to motivate you, so that we can look at them and think, 'Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person.'" She speaks freely of her own frequent experiences with this phenomenon, and I'd guess her words hit home with many, if not all, visibly disabled people: "I've lost count of the number of times that I've been approached by strangers wanting to tell me that they think I'm brave or inspirational, and this was long before my work had any kind of public profile. They were just kind of congratulating me for managing to get up in the morning and remember my own name. And it is objectifying."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with inspiration porn is that it gives voice to the very low expectations the world has for disabled people. By treating the completion of ordinary tasks as if they were monumental accomplishments, it shows just how incompetent people assume we are. For most disabled people, this experience is pervasive.

However, experiencing the objectification of inspiration porn isn't universal when it comes to parenting. In fact, it is an experience that my partner, a cisgender disabled woman, has never had. To be sure, many people still regard her parenting with what Silvers calls the presumption of incompetence.<sup>2</sup> However, it is not expressed in the same way. Rather than being told that she is mother of the year, she is asked why her toddler isn't wearing a coat.

Of course, this difference has everything to do with gender. When I am celebrated as a disabled father and Leah is disparaged as a disabled mother, I am being rewarded by what Serene Khader and Matthew Lindauer refer to in this same newsletter issue as the Daddy Dividend, “a cluster of gestures . . . that negatively tax the social esteem on men when they publicly do what they simply should do as basic parental duties.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet, at their root, these experiences are not so different. In both cases, there is this presumption that the disabled parent is inherently an inadequate parent. In both cases, the stakes are incredibly high. How long would it take for me to lose father of the year status, for example, if one of my kids were to be even minorly injured while under my care in public?

From our very first conversations about starting a family, Leah and I discussed the need to ensure our children’s health and safety to a much greater degree than what would be required of non-disabled parents. I practiced changing diapers on stuffed animals and lifting bags of flour in and out of our adapted crib because we believed that it was not a question of if child services would be called on us, but when. We knew that all of our racial, educational, and economic privilege would not protect us from the hostility directed toward disabled parents.

While this fear has not yet been realized almost four years into our parenting journey, it was certainly not unfounded. In the United States, there is a long history of violence against disabled parents, especially disabled mothers, beginning with the eugenics movement and its emphasis on forced sterilization to prevent disabled people from becoming parents in the first place.<sup>4</sup> These same attitudes toward parenting with a disability are now expressed via discrimination in access to advanced reproductive technologies and child custody,<sup>5</sup> which has been our greatest fear.

In a way, an analysis of the inspiration porn associated with parenting, specifically, may be what is needed to illuminate exactly what is so problematic about inspiration porn more generally. In my view, inspiration porn is not merely offensive, but it is dangerous. As Stella Young suggests, it is an expression of the statement, “Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person.” However, it seems to be more than that. It is also an expression of the statement, “If you fail to accomplish this mundane task in a way that we approve of, you will be subject to disproportionate ridicule, censure, control, and, if the stakes are high enough, punishment.”

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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**NOTES**

1. Stella Young, “Why the Lie We’ve Been Sold about Disability Is the Greatest Injustice,” <https://ollibean.com/the-lie/> (accessed January 13, 2020).
2. Anita Silvers, “Formal Justice,” in *Disability, Difference, Discrimination: Perspectives on Justice in Bioethics and*

*Public Policy*, eds. Anita Silvers, David Wasserman, and Mary B. Mahowald, 13–145 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998).

3. Serene Khader and Matthew Lindauer, “The ‘Daddy Dividend’: The Gender Division of Labor and Regression Towards Patriarchy,” *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* (2020).
4. For a rich discussion of eugenics and forced sterilization, see Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017).
5. For a detailed discussion that situates current discrimination against disabled parents in historical precedent, see National Council on Disability, *Rocking the Cradle: Ensuring the Rights of Parents with Disabilities and their Children*, 2012, [https://www.ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD\\_Parenting\\_508\\_0.pdf](https://www.ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD_Parenting_508_0.pdf) (accessed January 14, 2020).

*(Philosophizing about) Gender-Open Children*

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I’m at the playground with my baby, and a smiling adult inquires, “Is it a boy or a girl?” Scientific studies show that if I say X, they will see my baby as doing A, being A, feeling A—versus if I say Y.<sup>1</sup> They’ll likely make different assumptions about whether my baby is able to climb up the playground structures and sit without support, and they’ll encourage my baby to engage in different activities.<sup>2</sup> And of course, they’ll respond to them differently depending on whether they think the baby is a boy or a girl. What do I do if I don’t want that to happen? One way to respond to the question is not to reveal the gender, or rather, to reject the assumption that my baby already has a gender, which is arguably a weird move, breaking out of a smoothly functioning, well-oiled social exchange. Here I want to talk about this weird move: How weird it is? What are some of the reasons to make the move anyway, and what are some of the concerns?

Gender-open children are children who are not assigned a specific gender at birth. When caring for a gender-open baby, you don’t use binary gender pronouns (like “she” or “he”) to refer to them (you can use, for example, “they” singular), and you introduce your baby as a human who doesn’t have a gender yet. The best way to protect the baby from being treated and perceived according to the gender binary (as either a girl or a boy) is not to reveal their genital status, which is commonly taken to be critical in the determination of sex and to be straightforwardly associated with their gender. This can be done to different degrees, depending on the specific family and social context. When thinking about gender-open children, I see three conceptual spaces to philosophize: the space of parents; the space of children; and, finally, the space of those who theorize about gender-open children. Let’s start with the parents.

**1. PARENTS**

In this section I explore three different questions around the decision to raise a gender-open child.

### 1.1. ACTIVISM OLYMPICS

When I first put together my plan of having a baby and thought about the issue of gender, my first thought was “I would like gender to have no role in the baby’s life—to the extent that I can control this—until they themselves can decide how much gender they want in their life, and what kind of gender.” Later, I discovered that gender-open parenting is actually a thing. Just like attachment parenting, and many other parenting styles that surround any parent, like a nightmare landscape full of high-stakes choices. And pretty much any choice brings about social judgments and the accompanying consequences.

On the one hand, gender-open parenting being a thing makes it easier to explain it to relatives, friends, and strangers, as you constantly face the question, “Is it a boy or a girl?” When I respond: “I’m doing gender-open parenting” people assent, often with a poker face, and the conversation ends there. The power of a label! Whether or not they understand what it means, they understand that it is a thing, and its metaphysical, if totally mysterious, weight gives everyone at least a sense that the question about the baby’s gender has been answered, even if not in the way that they had expected. When I try the long explanation instead, it almost never works out, and we all leave the conversation frustrated. An additional merit of gender-open parenting is the very fact of naming this practice. After learning the notion of hermeneutical injustice, and/or experiencing hermeneutical injustice yourself, you come to very much appreciate new concepts that fill the conceptual gaps around marginalized identities, their experiences, and the practices that are relevant for them. Instead of the perhaps vague thought I mentioned above (“I would like gender to have no role in the baby’s life—to the extent that I can control this—until they themselves can decide how much gender they want in their life, and what kind of gender”), I can straightforwardly say, “I’m doing gender-open parenting. This is what I want for my child,” perhaps modifying with this labeling my own understanding of what I’m doing.<sup>3</sup> This label also makes it easier to find other parents and caregivers who are approaching their child’s gender in a similar way.

On the other hand, however, this label makes me cautious, because it puts the focus on the parents. And even though this couldn’t be otherwise (the baby is not the one who can decide whether or not to be assigned a gender at birth), I want to make sure this doesn’t become one of my lifestyle garments, like the fair-trade organic tea I consume, or the rainbow pin button I wear on my blazer. The specific question that concerns me is this: Is gender-open parenting a way for parents to expand their activism (perhaps, at the expense of their children)?

According to what I will call the Activism Olympics objection, gender-open parenting is yet another way, a pretty fashionable one, for someone to exercise their activism. While activism is okay, it seems that in this case, there might be something objectionable: Are we using our children as part of our activism gear? Are we doing this not for their own good, but for our own personal betterment and/or virtue signaling? My decision to raise my child gender open is not alien to my ideas about what makes

a better society, in particular, the ideas I have developed about gender and sex after several years of researching them. These ideas are the result of roughly four elements: first, the many empirical studies I’ve read and discussed about how the gender binary influences (often in very negative ways) our treatment of babies and children; second, my following the debates on the sad history (and present!) of the “science of sex differences”; third, the discussions and brainstorming sessions I have shared with philosophers and non-philosophers on the two elements above; and, finally, my own personal experience of gender identity.

It seems that having spent time thinking about gender and having strong ideas (and feelings) about it makes my parenting decision more vulnerable to the Activism Olympics objection. I do object to the gender binary, and I believe that people would be happier if freed from it. Raising a gender-open child sounds like a practical way of fighting against the gender binary, more eloquent than any paper I could ever write. But would the opposite (i.e., not having spent time thinking about gender, not having strong ideas about it) make my parenting decision less objectionable? It seems like an absurd result: the less involved you are intellectually, morally, and politically in this parenting decision, the less controversial it would be. To avoid the Activism Olympics objection, we need to find a different avenue: a possible way out of this objection is finding a place where we can raise our children according to our values, and this is not necessarily using them as instruments for our own betterment.

By taking this route, we are then confronted with the general question of whether it is ok to instill your values in your children. Raising my child gender open does not only consist of not assigning them a binary gender at birth. It is also about how I’ll talk to them about gender as they grow up, or how the characters in the tales I read to them interact and are referred to. That is, my child is being exposed to a set of ideas around gender, and in general, to a view of personal identity and personal relationships that is not determined and ruled by the dominant binary gender schema. Thus, I’m definitely trying to instill this more flexible view of gender and identity in my child.

If we decide that instilling your own values in your children is not a good practice, or needs independent justification (e.g., an argument that those values are good), then gender open parenting would need an additional defense, but the same could be said of raising children in the gender binary, which people commonly do. Being the default option doesn’t make binary-gender parenting value-neutral. Assigning babies a binary gender at birth and treating them, more or less intentionally, according to that gender, reveals a specific set of values (e.g., about what gender is and should be, what is best for the child, and how society is best organized). Someone could say that the fact that most people endorse those values and instill them into their children is already a good reason in favor of this default practice. But default options, as tempting as they are to our often lazy minds, need not be the best. They can even be detrimental to our well-being (there are plenty of examples in our history of default options that we now

acknowledge as detrimental to everyone involved, such as embracing slavery or opposing interracial marriage). In order to conclude anything about the goodness of the set of values surrounding the default practice of gender assignment at birth, we need independent reasons other than the sheer number of people doing it. I leave it for a different place to discuss what set of values is preferable.

### 1.2. FREE THE CHILDREN

We could say that when someone decides to raise their child gender open, they are doing it for the child's benefit, so that the child can flourish without the limitations imposed by the dominant gender norms. But can we be sure that being raised gender open is good for the child? How is not being assigned a (binary) gender good? One quick answer is that at a minimum, it doesn't have the negative consequences that assigning a binary gender has. You just need to glance at the studies on how the assigned (binary) gender of children mediates our perception of them (and their perceptions of themselves), to the extent of making us see different things depending on the gender we believe a child has (see references above). If you look at teenagers, and at your own teenage years, it's easy to see how expectations for the specific gender you are assigned (whether or not you identify with it) can make you miserable, from not having the perfect body shape, to not having the right talents.

However, this response leaves unanswered the question of whether the absence of an assigned gender at birth has problems of its own. One common objection in this regard is what I call the Missing Identity objection, according to which gender-open children are missing a critical element to build their identities.<sup>4</sup> Gender is very important to developing our identity, the reasoning goes, and gender-open children are being deprived of that. This objection has several problems. First of all, it misinterprets what raising a child gender open is: gender-open children are not being deprived of a gender identity. Rather, they simply do not have one imposed upon them, and are left free to pick one whenever they are ready, and change it as many times as they feel like. Moreover, it might be the case that eventually they do choose a gender within the binary. The difference is that it was a choice and specifically, *their* choice. Second, it assumes several problematic things: (i) that the gender binary is universal, as if all societies are organized according to this Western binary; (ii) that identity has to be necessarily mediated by this binary gender; and (iii) that reproductive capacities determine our identity, via determining our gender. Gender is essential to our identity, the reasoning goes, because it connects us to our communities by placing us in specific social roles, it gives us a place within that society, one that has to do with our anatomy, in particular our reproductive capacities. In sum, this reasoning assumes a Western, binary and cis status quo, spiced up with an essentialist view of gender. I won't argue against any of those assumptions here; there are wonderful works out there doing that already. The take-home message I would like to underscore is that gender-open parenting does not deny the importance of gender as a dimension of identity, nor does it deprive children of it (or foreclose the possibility that one day the child might choose to embrace a gender within the binary); but rather,

it calls into question those specific assumptions mentioned above. It contests the idea that in order to flourish as a person you need to give a very specific value to the dimension of gender, according to a strict, binary and very old set of norms.

Besides the above-mentioned problems, behind the Missing Identity objection seems to lurk the fear that if children are not assigned a gender at birth, then they might not grow into a stable binary gender identity. Instead, they might identify as non-binary, or who knows what. In response to this concern, first, another clarification is in order: raising a child gender open is not imposing upon them a non-binary gender identity. Rather, the idea is to free them from any imposed gender identity, until they have the knowledge and experiences to decide for themselves, in the same way they decide about other features of their identities. These children will grow up to identify in whatever way works for them, within or outside the binary, in a more or less fluid way. Second, this concern betrays a plain rejection of non-binary identities: Why are we assuming that only a stable binary gender identity is the right kind of identity? A different argument is needed here to arrive at the conclusion that non-binary identities are problematic. There are some arguments out there concluding that non-binary identities are not real.<sup>5</sup> For example, someone might have a social-position account of gender and conclude that there is no non-binariness, for when you look at how our societies are structured and normed, the reasoning goes, there is no place for non-binariness; that is, non-binariness is not a social position in the way that binary genders are; therefore, by definition, it doesn't exist.

There are at least three ways to respond to this reasoning. First, we can advocate for an account of gender that is not exclusively based on social position, but which also includes self-identification.<sup>6</sup> With this other account in hand, a lack of nonbinariness as a social location does not invalidate non-binary gender identities, as the latter does not hinge on the former. Second, we can argue, with Bettcher, that mainstream social practices around gender are not the only ones in town.<sup>7</sup> Instead, there are what she calls subaltern cultural practices around sex and gender that validate non-mainstream gender identity claims. In Bettcher's proposal, as long as there are cultural practices around gender, even if in minority, resistant spaces, gender identity claims get validated. Third, we can expand Bettcher's proposal and say that in order to validate a gender identity, established (even if in minority spaces) cultural practices are not necessary. While a (subaltern) cultural practice expands and supports individual patterns of resistance and efforts at identity-construction, a wholesale culture (e.g., practices, collectively shared concepts), even if subaltern, is not necessary to validate experiences that build identities.<sup>8</sup> For example, someone might develop inchoate resistant concepts for their experiences in conversations with a close friend, in the absence of a collectively acknowledged space for those experiences. An interlocutor who listens and makes the effort to understand<sup>9</sup> in the way prescribed by Medina could be enough to validate those experiences as identity-building.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. CHILDREN

In this section, I explore the following question: How are gender-open children contesting dominant gender norms? I think gender-open children are contesting the gender binary, and dominant gender norms more generally, in a new way. Although I identified the space of children as a separate space to reflect upon, when thinking about how gender-open children might contest dominant gender norms it is clear that at least for their first years, if we require some sort of intention for contestation to happen, then it is the child's parents and/or caregivers who contest these norms, not the child themselves. Perhaps a better way to articulate this inquiry into how gender-open children contest dominant gender norms would be this: What are gender-open children inviting us to do differently (in relation to dominant gender norms)?

Gender-open children invite us to rethink dominant ideas and practices about gender. Here I focus on one of them, the Gender Disclosure norm. According to this norm, we owe it to society to disclose our gender. Not doing so means failing to play by the rules. It's like not respecting the turn taking in a conversation or randomly changing the topic: you are breaking norms that help coordinate social behavior. Not disclosing your gender prevents others from treating you appropriately, for they won't know how. It causes confusion. Moreover, the expectation is not only that everyone discloses their gender, but also, that we do it correctly, unless we want to deceive others. Trans folks are often accused of deceiving, because they might signal a gender that is, according to dominant gender norms, not the correct one. For Talia Bettcher, the normalized practice is about disclosing your sex (or rather, your genital status, which plays a crucial role in determining one's sex in our cultural practices), and this disclosure happens by marking your gender appropriately ("appropriately" here works under the assumption that there is a straightforward relationship between one's sex and one's gender). In her words, "Gender presentation literally signifies physical sex."<sup>11</sup>

Marilyn Frye writes that this compulsory disclosure comes with an associated urgent need "to know or be able to guess the sex of every single person with whom one has the slightest or most remote contact or interaction."<sup>12</sup> This need to know becomes intensely apparent when you care for a gender-open baby. I remember a friend expressing their frustration with exactly those words after repeatedly asking for the baby's gender: "But I need to know." This need might start fading as soon as you make the effort to pause and reflect on what you need that information for. In the case of babies, this pause should be enough to realize you actually don't need that information.

There is a decision tree guide cartoon, "How to tell if a toy is for boys or girls: A guide."<sup>13</sup> It consists of only one question: "Do you operate the toy with your genitalia?" If yes, it's not for kids. If no, it's for either boys or girls. And, I would add, for those who are neither. Somehow, this simplicity ends up lost on us. We panic, as did the owner of a shoe store in my hometown. An old family friend, the store owner decided to give my baby a gift: a pair of sandals. The owner headed for the shelves but stopped dead in tracks: "But . . . I don't

know which color." The owner stared at us, paralyzed in the middle of the shop, with shelves of sparkling pink shoes shining in the background, as if desperately trying to entice all of us away from our resistant attitude. My sibling came to the rescue, casual and effective: "What about yellow, white, red, green, orange, or black? There are many colors." The shoe store owner came back to life from what had looked like a spell: "Oh, of course." With contented expression, the owner handed us a pair of tiny white sandals.<sup>14</sup> The shoes were for the feet—baby girls' feet, baby boys' feet, or gender-open-babies' feet, and be they white, yellow, blue, or green, they all get pulled off, chewed on, and thrown out of the stroller for the fun of watching your parent pick them up, over and over again—but that's a whole other story.

The shoe store owner was not an outlier in feeling at a loss for a moment. In societies like the one I'm writing from, there are two different scripts that track perceived sex/gender. "[I]n everything one does," Frye writes, "one has two complete repertoires of behavior, one for interactions with women and one for interactions with men. Greeting, storytelling, order-giving and order-receiving, negotiating, gesturing deference or dominance, encouraging, challenging, asking for information: one does all of these things differently depending upon whether the relevant others are male or female."<sup>15</sup>

Gender-open children do not conform to the Gender Disclosure norm, providing an opportunity to reflect on it. And they invite us to embrace the dissonance of not knowing what script to follow, and to be creative. However, gender-open children are not necessarily promises of annihilation of the gender binary. When they grow up and start making decisions about their gender identity, they might contest the gender binary and other dominant gender norms, or they might end up endorsing (some or maybe even all of) them. If my child ends up embracing a binary gender identity, and one that has been traditionally associated with the way the hospital sexed their body when they were born, I will not take that as a defeat. Any outcome that stems from my child's freedom will be a success and the very goal of this entire endeavor.

## 3. THOSE WHO PHILOSOPHIZE ABOUT GENDER-OPEN CHILDREN

As a feminist philosopher who has worked on sex and gender, raising a gender-open child is a tasty topic to philosophize about. Here I am, after all, writing this piece on gender-open children.

As I wrote above, my decision to raise my child gender open is not alien to the work I've done on sex and gender. While being related to my work seems to give my parenting decision a sort of academic halo, I want to make sure this halo doesn't reach too far. I want to make sure that I keep my theorizing in check. Let me explain my concerns.

When philosophizing about gender-open children, I set a warning to myself: I should make sure my mental gymnastics take into account that I'm talking about a specific person (my child) and real people in general, people who, in this case, are not in a position to speak for themselves, but

who will be at some point. When theorizing about other people's identities, I see that an ethical commitment is required. They are not tables, propositions, or hypothetical aliens. This ethical commitment is, interestingly, nothing extraordinary to ask for.

Having a research ethics is not, at least it is not intended to be, a limit on the sort of conclusions we can arrive at, given the facts. It's rather about the way we proceed in our research, the values that guide our inquiry, and the goals we set for it. This is just the paraphernalia that accompanies any scientific inquiry. A research ethics for theorizing about other people's identities invites us to reflect, as individual researchers and as a society, on why we are interested in researching the questions we do. This applies to science generally. We don't do science on everything. Not all possible questions are investigated, not even all reasonable questions. Only those that bear on something we are worried about, something we are interested. For example, there are many scientific studies comparing cognitive capacities of humans and chimpanzees, but we are a lot less concerned with comparing cognitive lives of turtles and tortoises. The same happens in philosophy. It's only the overly optimistic or, perhaps rather, vain philosophers who think that there is no actual limit to the questions that philosophy can explore. There are limits to philosophy: the limit is set by our interests, our concerns, our desires, and available resources. Every once in a while, we should wonder why we inquire into the questions we do (again, as individuals and as a society). This meta-inquiry can reveal a lot about the very issues we are investigating.

Take, for example, the so-called "science of sex differences": Why does it never lose its sexiness? Why do we keep producing studies about sex differences? Asking this question can tell us more interesting things than perhaps any single study within it. Perhaps we are obsessed with sex differences for reasons that are independent of how many differences there actually are and what their origin is. Similar things can be said about studies on racial differences. There are those who see in this meta-question a threat to freedom, and a desperate attempt at hiding ugly truths. "Let science be science," they say as a response. But, as feminist philosophers of science have been arguing for decades, science is not something that happens independently of (communities of) scientists who work within specific social contexts. Whatever the "science" in "let science be science" is, it is already inevitably shaped by interests, values, and fears of our society. So we are letting it be science, while also being mindful of the choices that shape it, typically hidden beyond awareness of the scientific community and the consumers of science. A healthy reflection on our interest in sex and race can go a long way in helping us understand those very notions, and provide us with some perspective on our inquiries. Why are we interested? What is our goal when pursuing those studies?

Interestingly, philosophical debates always include some self-reference questioning, for example, about the importance of the debate at issue. So philosophy is plagued with questions about the significance of the very philosophical inquiries we engage in, and about the goals

and purposes of our inquiry. Thus, it is far from radical to ask philosophers, when engaging in philosophizing about other people's identities, to take the time to reflect about the interests guiding their theorizing, and the purposes of their inquiry. This reflection can be humbling, as you might come to realize that what you thought was pure, neutral, and objective theorizing (whatever that means), stems from very specific commitments about what those identities must be; that it is not by natural law that only certain identities are up for questioning, but by our own contingent social norms. That what you thought was a purely innocent and definitely enriching new addition to the marketplace of ideas is actually another way of enforcing, if in new elaborate jargon, the same old ideas about how things should be. Would there be gender wars if our societies had different values about what gender should be? It's not a war about the facts, it's about values.

Summing up: I call for a research ethics when philosophizing, especially when philosophizing about other peoples' identities. First, this does not mean putting a limit to an actual limitless philosophy. Philosophy has limits. It is not, and never was, free of our values and fears, and these set the limits. Second, a research ethics keeps us in touch with those values and fears, and this will enrich our inquiry and make us more responsible researchers. Thus, I propose the following ethical avowal:

when philosophizing about other people's identities, I will have ethical principles guiding my inquiry, and I will use these principles as I reflect on my interest on the subject matter, the goals of my inquiry (e.g., Why am I interested in this? What do I want to attain with my research?), and the way I proceed in my research. This does not imply that my philosophizing will be spoiled or coerced towards specific positions. It means I will examine my subject matter not from an impossibly abstract and supposedly neutral armchair, but acknowledging and being transparent about the values that are guiding my inquiry in more or less implicit ways.

I commit to philosophize about gender-open children guided by this research ethics.

My child will grow up, and I hope they won't have to see me engaged in philosophical debates about the authenticity of their gender identity.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both the theory and practice of gender-open parenting are complicated. Lots of awkwardness in playgrounds and shoe stores, but also lots of wonderful discoveries as you see yourself and others creating new ways of interacting and categorizing. And definitely a very attractive topic for discussion for those of us professionally and personally interested in gender. The well-being of real human individuals is at stake, sometimes clashing against the value of uprooting problematic social patterns. We can tread through it in a sensitive and reasonable manner, keeping in check our biases and self-promoting needs, and embracing the challenge to both our theories and our imagination.

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## NOTES

1. See Condry and Condry, "Sex Differences: A Study of the Eye of the Beholder"; Burnham and Harris, "Effects of Real Gender and Labeled Gender on Adults' Perceptions of Infants."
2. See Fausto-Sterling, Lamarre, and Coll, "Sexing the Baby: Part 1—What Do We Really Know about Sex Differentiation in the First Three Years of Life?" for a review of relevant research.
3. Hacking, "Making Up People."
4. See, for example, the opinion expressed here by psychotherapist Fran Walfish: <https://www.parents.com/parenting/should-you-raise-a-gender-neutral-baby/>.
5. See Ayala-López, "Gender Hallucinations: Non-Binary Identities and Social Positions," for references.
6. Jenkins, "Towards an Account of Gender Identity."
7. Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority."
8. Ayala-López, "Gender Hallucinations."
9. By having an open mind and utilizing hermeneutical resources to interpret the speaker alternative to the mainstream structurally prejudiced ones, this interlocutor would avoid committing what Dotson calls contributory injustice (Dotson, "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression").
10. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*.
11. Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," 105.
12. Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, 22.
13. From Jezebel: A Supposedly Feminist Website. <https://jezebel.com/how-to-tell-if-a-toy-is-for-boys-or-for-girls-494034840>.
14. In relation to this paralysis when meeting a person of whom you cannot guess their sex, Frye writes: "Of course the paralysis does not last. One is rescued by one's ingenuity and good will; one can invent a way to behave as one says 'How do you do?' to a human being. But the habitual ways are not for humans: they are one way for women and another for men" (*The Politics of Reality*, 20).
15. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 20.

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## Taking Children's Autonomy Seriously as a Parent

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My research tends to be rather egocentric; I write about what I am experiencing and passionate about in the moment. Fifteen to twenty years ago, my research revolved around the culture of pregnancy and infant care. Now, with my eighteen-year-old child having freshly moved away from home to launch their adult life, I spend a lot of time thinking about the culture of parenting older children as they transition into adult people. I argued in *Mass Hysteria* (2005) that we labored under a damaging cultural myth that equated good mothering with an erasure of the boundaries between mother and infant. Lately I've been thinking about a different kind of agency- and boundary-obliterating parenting mythology. I think that we fundamentally fail to respect the basic autonomy rights that children have as people, and indeed that we equate "good parenting" with severe violations of these autonomy rights. We accept and even approve of subjugating children to their parents' will in ways that would be shocking if enacted against other sorts of people. Here I want to argue—in provisional, overly sweeping terms—for a radical reorientation of how we think about children's autonomy and parents' duties to enable and respect it. This essay has a bit of a manifesto-like feel to it, and I recognize that each of my claims requires more argument, and that I've left a great number of important details unaddressed. My goal is to display what I take to be something deeply morally wrong with how we picture parenting and its goals, and to offer up a different framework.

My moral starting point is that children are people. Not partial people, or on-their-way-to-being people, but people. Like many people, their competence and skills are limited, and they are dependent on others in various distinctive ways, but this is no compromise of their moral personhood whatsoever. And yet it is routine that we disregard the basic personhood and moral dignity of children in ways that would be clearly unacceptable for almost any other group. For instance, it is common for well-educated, progressive people to say, almost proudly, that they "don't like children," which we would simply never say about any other category of people. These same people would be horrified by someone claiming that they just "don't like Hispanics" or "don't like lesbians" or whatever it may be. Children are people; how could it be acceptable to dislike them based on their demographic group membership? Moreover, there is good evidence that children's testimony is routinely discounted, and that they are treated as less reliable reporters than they are, without anyone feeling the need to give evidence for this discounting.<sup>1</sup> We gaslight children by insisting that incomprehensible things such as Santa Claus are real and then lie directly when they question us, and think it's cute when they believe our lies.

More directly to the point, we restrict where children can go and what they can do even when there is no evidence-based argument for doing so. We make decisions about which hobbies they will have, which friends they can have, which relatives they will hug. Basically, we violate all of the ground-level rules we normally recognize for how to treat people as self-determining agents with dignity.

As people, children's autonomy rights—which for my purposes broadly include their rights to self-determination, privacy, dignity, and freedom from subjugation—are as strong and as central to their flourishing as anyone else's. I want to take it as a starting point that, especially given our position of power and children's vulnerability, one of our core moral tasks as a parent is to enhance and protect our children's autonomy as much as possible. But in fact, cultural parenting norms push in almost the opposite direction. Not only do we routinely and grotesquely violate children's self-determination and privacy—restricting their mobility, their choices of activity, their speech, their dress, and much more—but we associate “good parenting” with these kinds of violations, judging other parents who refrain from them as irresponsible or uncaring. What justifies these violations? I think that there are two undergirding ideologies here, both of which are deeply morally wrong.

The first is the idea that children are not full people with normal autonomy rights because they are less competent and more dependent on others for care and support than are (most) adults. But surely if we have learned anything from listening to disability theorists and bioethicists who think about competence, it is that *independence* is not a requirement for moral personhood; indeed, fluctuating dependency is a part of the human condition. The moral ideal is that we scaffold the agency of those who are dependent, and support those with less than full competence, so that they can express their autonomy as much as possible. Certainly, outside of the domain of childhood, we do not think that we have the right to subjugate, coerce, or gaslight those who are dependent on us or those who need help with competence. Our moral task, as Hilde Lindemann so beautifully puts it in *Holding and Letting Go*, is to *hold* others in personhood when they are vulnerable and dependent, not to co-opt their personhood.<sup>2</sup>

Parents have immense power over children, because children cannot afford basic necessities or protect their safety without us. Many parents think that it is obvious that with this power comes the right to restrict our children's mobility and their choices, and to subjugate them to our will and vision. But quite the opposite seems right to me. Precisely because children are vulnerable and dependent on us in this way, we should be extra careful not to abuse our power. Just as a dissertation adviser needs to go especially out of her way to protect the autonomy of her student because of the power differential between them, the power imbalance gives parents *extra* reasons to be careful not to violate their children's autonomy. Similarly, decent people think that it's especially demeaning and violating to tell those who depend on government assistance programs how to spend their money or their time, or to subject them to special surveillance. Children's economic dependence on their parents in no way licenses us using our economic

power against them as a tool of lifestyle control. Our children's dependence on us is something that ought to make us *more* concerned about protecting and enabling their fragile autonomy, privacy, and dignity, not less.

The second undergirding ideology is that it's parents' right, and indeed their responsibility, to *create a specific kind of person*. Indeed, it is deeply woven into our productivity culture that we treat children as *products*—as things that we craft—and that we measure our own success by how well we create what we set out to create, regardless of how we got there. Coercion, regulation, and surveillance are acceptable and even expected as tools for creating these products. I think this idea penetrates deeply into our imagination of what reproduction is all about. When we reproduce, we are not just creating a biological entity, but also reproducing families, communities, and generations. It makes sense that we want to create good people who live by values and make contributions that we admire. It is a small step from there to feeling like we have the right to *demand* that our child turns into a certain kind of person, or to take coercive and manipulative steps to *make* them be one. When it comes to parenting, the ends are almost always used to justify the means: We almost axiomatically treat a parenting method as “good” and worth emulating if it contributes to creating “successful” people (whatever our standards are for that).

For example, arguments against physically assaulting children (or “corporal punishment,” as it is euphemistically known) generally proceed without pause by arguing that assaulting them makes them *turn out less well in the end*. It seems to me, though, that the argument against corporal punishment is that assaulting people is wrong. It is completely unnecessary for me to know anything at all about the long-term outcomes from assaulting children in order for me to condemn the morality of the practice. This is an extreme case, but similarly, as a culture we push back (rather gently) against “tiger moms” and “helicopter parents” by arguing that they supposedly *produce* adults with insufficient grit or creativity or whatever, not by directly saying that controlling other people and invading their privacy is wrong. But children are not products; their quality is not a measure of our parenting success. They are people. We don't get to use force or manipulation or autonomy restrictions to help determine what kind of people they will be, because doing that to other people is wrong, simpliciter.

In contrast to these two ideologies, I think that we ought to enable and protect children's autonomy however we can, and to make incursions into it only when absolutely necessary, and then only in ways driven by good-quality reasons and evidence. We are, I think, morally obliged to parent by way of what I think of as a “minimal restriction” and a “minimum invasion” principle, according to which we curtail children's self-determination and invade their privacy to the minimum extent possible. The two legitimate reasons why as parents we do sometimes need to compromise our children's autonomy are: (1) when we are directly protecting them from a clear and present danger, because they are not able to keep themselves safe, and (2) when exercising their autonomy would directly and substantially diminish

the autonomy or the well-being of other people, notably including other people with whom they are living and must coordinate and cooperate (we parents included).<sup>3</sup>

Of course, when children are very young, these two conditions will kick in a lot, and there will have to be many incursions into their autonomy indeed. A three-year-old is routinely not in a good position to make safe choices about where to go and what to do, and they are typically terrible at cooperating, taking others' needs into account, and making reasonable demands. All the same, my least-restriction and minimum-invasion principles apply to young children as well; it's just that the "least" and the "minimum" will be quite high. Though we will often have to compromise their autonomy or privacy, we are not justified in doing so just because it is more convenient for us, or because we want them to be a certain kind of person, or because we wish they had different desires than they have. For instance, the principles definitively rule out ever making a young child kiss or hug a relative (or anyone else) they don't want to, regardless of whether it hurts the person's feelings not to, and regardless of whether it is socially expected that they will. It rules out making them play any game, or have any friend, or pursue any hobby against their will. It rules out forced audience participation and forced birthday party attendance. It definitely rules out forced food consumption, unless there is a present medical danger that necessitates that they ingest something. These are all routine coercions that we enact upon the bodies of young children, which neither protect their safety in an evidence-based way nor protect the substantive autonomy or well-being of other people. That we think that a child will turn out better in the long run if they do these things cannot speak against moral principles as serious as those of respecting the autonomy and privacy of other people.

The situation becomes more interesting, I think, when we turn to older children—pre-teens and teens, who are able to go places on their own, and can form sophisticated goals, relationships, tastes, and preferences, and who understand the basic rules of how to stay safe, and the basic principles of what is and isn't a viable plan (that is, they are unlikely to demand that you turn them into a dinosaur). At this point, it seems to me, coercively restricting, monitoring, and controlling children beyond what is needed to keep them safe and to ensure that they are not harming others is both extraordinarily common, and wrong. People should have basic rights of mobility and of self-determination when it comes to where they go; which avocational skills they develop; how they dress; who they spend their time with; what they play, watch, and read;<sup>4</sup> who they touch and how; what they eat; and more. These rights are core components of people's autonomy and privacy.

It is parents' responsibility to teach their children early about how to stay safe, how to reason about risk, and generally how to make good choices, through discussion and example. But once a child has these competencies, it is a violation of their privacy and autonomy to monitor and restrict their movements and relations. For example, once children are competent at finding their way home and at using a phone to get help if needed, it is, I believe, none of parents' business where they go or who they spend

their time with, when they are not at school or meeting family responsibilities. Parents widely and unquestioningly assume that they have the right to this information, but I simply don't understand what the basis of that right could be. Controlling and surveilling people's motion and relationships is a deep form of subjugation, and children are people. Some parents will object that it would be awful to be completely cut off from their child's life in this way. But this betrays the assumption that your child will talk to you about their life and their day only under coercive threat, and if that is true, then parenting has already derailed. Normal, free people who live together and are intimately connected voluntarily keep one another reasonably informed about their lives, but they don't get to coercively control or monitor one another's comings and goings.

Similarly, and I am sure contentiously, I insist that once a parent is reasonably sure that their child has a good understanding of sexual safety and consent and the importance of each, it is none of parents' business when or with whom their child decides to have sex. Precisely because we are responsible for enabling and protecting their autonomy, we are responsible for making sure they have this understanding as soon and as thoroughly as possible. But once they do, our role in their sexual decision-making is over.<sup>5</sup> People's sexual lives and preferences are deeply private, and controlling or insisting upon surveilling someone's sexual choices is seriously invasive, and children are people.

I have acknowledged that parents can impose restrictions on adolescent and preadolescent children if they have good reasons to think that these restrictions are required to keep them safe, or if the restrictions are needed so that no one else is seriously harmed or restricted. In contrast, one factor that does *not* count as a morally legitimate reason to impose a restriction is that it will make the parent feel better or more comfortable, albeit not for any evidence-based reason. For example, many parents do not allow their children—especially girls—to be out alone after dark, because of fears of kidnapping or rape. But street kidnapping is an extraordinarily rare crime, and stranger rape is rare as well; in the United States, girls are at dramatically less risk of assault on the street than they are at school or at home. But we've created a moral panic that has served the specific purpose of restricting the mobility of girls and women. Parents who have internalized this panic, when confronted with the actual statistics, will often tell me that they know I am right about the objective risks, but that they will just "feel more comfortable" if their daughter isn't out alone, perhaps because they don't want to "imagine" what might happen. It seems to me like a paradigmatic example of a morally unjustified autonomy violation to restrict and control another person's movement through public space for the sake of one's own (admittedly irrational) psychological comfort.

To a large extent, one person's authority to restrict and surveil the basic mobility of another person always relies on implicit threats and fear. I think that by the time my child was in middle school, I had lost—or, better, divested myself of—the authority to tell them where to be, even if I had wanted to. If I had told them that they were grounded,

they would have just calmly disagreed. My child knew that I would never hurt them or stop supporting or protecting them even if they did something I did not want them to do, so there was no implicit threat to back up such a ruling on my part, and I am glad of that; this was an important sign of my child's trust in me.

Of course we do, in fact, have a legitimate interest in our children turning out to be good, happy people who contribute to the world in interesting and worthwhile ways. Many people also have an interest in raising children who will share their culture, be part of their community, and carry on their traditions. We raise our children in specific communities, surrounded by specific ways of life, modeling specific values and engaging in specific traditions. In the normal course of events, children will grow up at least somewhat identified with and shaped by these experiences. It is not only morally permissible but generally laudatory to expose our children to our values, inviting them to participate in our ways of life, and using rational persuasion to get them to make choices we think they should make as best we can. These are ways of showing respect for them as people and valued community members.

But it is always possible that our children, given the freedom to do so, will reject part or all of their communities of origin and their values. (Of course, we run the risk that they will reject values and ways of life we care about eventually even if we do coerce them into conforming while they are children.) They may do this for reasons of personal taste, or because they have genuinely good reasons to critique these communities (for their homophobia, ethnocentrism, sex-shaming, or whatever it may be). This is just a risk we are stuck with accepting, as parents. One cannot morally impose an identity on someone by compulsion. In general, we find it morally abhorrent to keep people in a community and a way of life by force, and I see no reason why children should be an exception. We need to shape our children into people we are proud of, to the extent we can, via engagement, persuasion, collaboration, and presenting them with a way of life that is valuable and fulfilling, not by instituting a totalitarian regime in the home.

Children differ widely in temperament, needs, skills development, and risk reasoning. The minimum necessary restrictions and incursions required by one child in one context may be very different from those required for another child in another context. But none of that variation defeats the fundamental moral principle for which I am urging here: Since children are people, it is our moral duty to restrict their autonomy and invade their privacy as little as possible. Just as we've built it into law that children are owed an education in a "least restrictive environment," regardless of their needs and abilities, they have a moral right to no less in the home. Neither their dependence on us, nor their nascent competence, nor our power over them, nor our desire to "produce" a certain kind of person can undercut that duty.

**NOTES**

1. Tollefsen and Burroughs, "Learning to Listen: Epistemic Injustice and the Child."

2. Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*.
3. Notice that I am only talking about *parents'* incursions into their children's autonomy and privacy; my focus on this paper is entirely on parenting. It is, of course, also true that children, like all people, are subject to laws and restrictions imposed by the state. I could write a separate paper on whether our laws regulating and restricting what children do are just and legitimate, but that issue is not my topic here.
4. I do think there's some complexity here if a child wants to consume something that is hateful, like a racist or misogynist game, because it is reasonable to not want actively hateful material in one's house. I'm not sure exactly how to negotiate the line here. I always erred on the side of not restricting or disallowing anything and instead being very vocal in my critiques and encouraging a lot of discussion about why I objected to the thing and why my child enjoyed the thing. But I feel like my tolerance limits could have been reached if my child had picked awful enough material.
5. Certainly, fathers don't get to play the creepy culturally sanctioned game of delaying their daughter's dating altogether via threats of violence against potential dates.

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## Parenting in Trauma

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The call for papers for this issue of the *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* includes the hope that discussion on the many facets of parenting will be "important for many philosophers who have and who are thinking about having children."<sup>1</sup> I hope this too, and agree that it is likely that more discussion on parenting and childrearing is important for those engaged in these activities. However, I want to make a more ambitious claim than that—I want to say that serious discussion and engagement with issues of parenting and childrearing is important for *philosophy*, if we want to continue to assert that philosophy is important for understanding reality, the world we live in, and our experience. This is not a wholly original statement, of course, as a wealth of scholarly, philosophical engagement (including my own) with these topics over the last several decades shows.<sup>2</sup> But my contention is perhaps more pointed than that the discussion is important: what I am saying is that for the sake of philosophy's claims to be able to explain the world, philosophy needs to spend more time and effort thinking about the work of parenting, and understanding the development of children.

I have arrived at this belief through a very difficult experience of childrearing. About fifteen years ago, my partner and I adopted two children from foster care, and over about the first year and a half with them, we began to understand just how much we did not know about the kind of parenting that we were going to have to do. As they began to feel safer, they began to disclose more of the effects of the neglect

and abuse they had experienced in their birth home and in the foster placements they had been in subsequent to being removed from that birth home. Although we do not know with certainty what that experience was, we know with significant clarity what many of the effects are, and they are severe. My experience in parenting, then, is the specific experience of parenting children who have been traumatized in multiple ways over an extended period of time. They were traumatized through the neglect of birth parents who were drug addicted, thus often under the influence of those drugs (and the evidence is clear that neglect has significant effects on infants and children), as well as through domestic violence in their birth home and direct physical and sexual abuse. They were nine and four years old when they came to live with us, which means that their formative years were spent in trauma-producing circumstances, such that whatever sense of self they had at that point had been, as trauma therapist Judith Herman puts it, “formed in and through trauma.”<sup>3</sup>

As a parent, such an experience is generally not one that is hoped for. Although we had had extensive training through our adoption agency, and we understood (intellectually, at least) that the likelihood was very high that any children coming through the foster care system would have some level of traumatic effects to work through, we were still at times overwhelmed by the level and kinds of difficulties inherent in the task of parenting children with severe developmental trauma, as it is coming to be called.<sup>4</sup> As a parent, I needed to do everything I could to try to help my wonderful, beloved, undeservedly harmed children recover. As a philosopher, my sense of needing to understand drove me to immerse myself in the study of trauma and trauma therapies. What I realized I needed, as a philosopher-mother, was a philosophy of trauma; what I discovered, of course, was that there was very little to be had. Although quite a lot was to be found in cultural studies, literary studies, and psychology, of course, only a very few brave pioneers in philosophy, such as Susan Brison,<sup>5</sup> had published work on trauma. Under the impulse of necessity, I began to cobble together what I could of a philosophy of trauma, especially with regard to the developmental trauma of children who have been traumatized under circumstances like my children had: the prolonged and chronic trauma of having to live with the abusers; the betrayal trauma of being harmed by those who have the responsibility of your care and are supposed to love you; the loss of being forcibly removed from the only home you have ever known, together with the contradictory relief of escaping from that abusive home. In hopes that it will prove useful to other parents who might find themselves in somewhat similar circumstances (which, of course, can be created in many ways; trauma is not only produced by abusive situations but also by, for example, divorce, accidents, natural disasters, and oppressions), and in hopes that philosophers more generally will begin to realize that we need to understand these things, I offer some of what I believe are implications of trauma for parenting and philosophical understanding.

### **TRAUMA AFFECTS BASIC INTERACTIONS**

If we didn’t have other ways of knowing this, new developments and trends in neuroscience and brain imaging would still provide us with overwhelming evidence

that trauma affects the development of the brain in infants and young children and the working of the brain in older children and adults. One of the major effects of this in infants and young children is that trauma changes their ability to form the basic attachments that are required for the creation of what is referred to as an internal model of safe relationship.<sup>6</sup> The optimal kind of attachment ability, which is called secure attachment, is created through the experience of being attended to and cared for appropriately as an infant and very young child. In simple terms, infants get hungry, or wet, or frightened, so they cry. If all is going well, a familiar caretaker (usually a primary caretaker or one of a small set of caretakers) appears to comfort them and provide whatever it is that they need. In good circumstances, this happens over and over again, reliably, throughout the child’s formative years, and the result of this is that the child learns to trust, and to believe that their world is relatively safe. That is, this experience creates for the child an internal image of relationship in which their needs are reliably met, and they are consistently cared for appropriately, with stability and affection. This internal model then remains active throughout their lives (unless it is disrupted), allowing them to form new relationships in the expectation that each relationship will work in the same way, and with a sense of appropriate interactions that enables them to reject relationships which do not in fact live up to the expectation. In ordinary development, they learn that they also should live up to such an expectation for others.

Traumatic experience during the formative years makes it impossible for infants and young children to develop and/or sustain such a model of interaction, because, obviously, it is not the interaction they are having. Neglect creates traumatic effects precisely for this reason: it means that no one is in fact responding to the needs of the infant or child, no one is consistently appearing to comfort and care for them. The development of the above described internal model is not possible, then, and the child develops an insecure model of attachment, which affects their ability to form relationships throughout their life if no intervention occurs. Severe neglect may lead to conditions in which a child fails to thrive (a technical term in pediatrics) in which case they suffer malnutrition and attendant problems, and which if extreme, leads to death.<sup>7</sup>

Here, then, is an implication of trauma that philosophy needs to take seriously: the kinds and quality of interactions that we have with others is essential to the development of a sense of self. For most feminist philosophers, I take it that this will come as no surprise; we have been working for decades with the belief that humans are interdependent, relationally autonomous creatures<sup>8</sup> rather than the separate and totally (almost ferociously) autonomous beings of liberal individualism. But here is a different kind of evidence that seems to me utterly undeniable: if infants and children do not get the proper kinds of interactions, they do not develop certain relational abilities, which may prevent them from forming satisfying, mutually trusting relationships throughout their lives. That is, one’s ability to function as a successfully (relationally) autonomous individual depends on one’s having the basic interactions of stable, consistent caretaking in one’s infancy and early childhood. *Having a “good” sense of self depends, ordinarily, on having these experiences.*

I do not mean to say that one absolutely cannot create a good sense of self if one was traumatized as a child, but the level of difficulty in doing so is very high, and it is a different project from that early developmental one. Our children, traumatized through neglect and through direct abuse, came to us with “bad” senses of self. Their senses of self were bad in that they believed they were bad children, having been told they were, but also in that their senses of self were incapable of doing the kinds of thing that a good sense of self can do. They could not form healthy, secure attachments, but rather sought to get their needs met mainly through deception and manipulation, as they had had to do in their birth home. They could not trust anyone because no one in their important relationship schemas had been consistently trustworthy. They could not be friends or accept ordinary friendship because they had been taught that they were for the use of others, and that others, in turn, were for their use. And it is important to realize that these were not casual lessons that could easily be set aside once they were presented with better alternatives; these were formative lessons, part of their identities, and as such very resistant to change, even if they could come to see that those changes would be for the better.

### **TRAUMA AFFECTS ABILITY TO PLAY**

Given the above effects on interactions, it seems obvious that play would be affected as well, although I confess it wasn’t obvious to us and we were sometimes baffled, at first, by our children’s playing and lack of playing. Some games seemed perfectly ordinary. A perennial favorite, the “chase me” game, was one we played endlessly (or at least it seemed endless to me, as running was never my strong suit!). They knew many games already, and we taught them many of our favorite games, both indoor and outdoor: board games indoors, frisbee, badminton, ring toss, bocce, and croquet for outdoors.

We realized fairly quickly, though, that the instructions “go play x” were never sufficient, even if they knew the game. Either they did not want to play that, or it would last for about five minutes and then they would be back asking what they could do. We also began to observe that they did not engage in imaginative play—they would not, on their own, create a game or a scenario for playing in. Even with toys like Legos, which tend to enable imaginative play as kids put them together in a variety of ways and make up things to use them for, our children did not play the same way as others. If we said “make something up,” it was as though they just did not understand the project.

But that was odd because they seemed to have sufficient imagination in some ways. Ask them to talk about monsters, for example, and they had plenty of things to say, and plenty of ideas about how to fight them and how you needed to protect yourself from them. Gradually, through observing them, playing with them, and learning about traumatic effects, we came to understand a couple of things about post-trauma playing.

One thing we came to realize was that they did not like to play without our direct participation. One reason for this might have been that they wanted our attention, and that is certainly likely, as they did want our attention. But it is

also probable that their lack of security and inability to trust made it difficult for them to play without our “help,” because they were not secure about whether they were doing it “right.” If we were there, guiding the interactions, then they could be relatively sure it was going ok, and that they were not going to do something wrong and get into trouble for it, be punished for it. That is, any adopted kids (if they were adopted as older than infants) are likely to have a fairly long period of adjustment in a new family, in which they have to learn how to “do things right” in that family; this includes learning how to play properly. They are likely to be anxious until they have figured out what playing properly is like.

For traumatized kids, this anxiety is exponentially greater because they have been in unstable circumstances in which punishments and outbursts of anger could not be either reliably predicted or understood (and certainly not avoided). One of the common effects of trauma, hyperarousal, refers to the survivor’s need to remain on “high alert” to watch for the signs of impending danger at all times. This survival strategy is necessary in order to allow the survivor to bring to bear any and all possible counter-tactics if danger seems imminent. For example, being able to detect early signs of an impending episode of violence makes it possible to try distracting or soothing tactics in hopes of preventing or mitigating the outburst. Consider, then, what it might be like to try to play while maintaining the constant awareness of the environment and especially the moods and emotional indicators of the parents or other caretakers/adults, the ones who are most likely to be the source of such danger. If “getting it right” means avoiding a beating, or being allowed to eat, then a significant amount of a child’s attention and mental and emotional energies must be directed at getting it right. In the absence of certainty (or as much as can be had) of getting it right, it may seem better to the child simply not to take a chance; that is, it may be better not to play at all.

So here is another implication for philosophy: even something like play cannot be taken for granted as an obvious, universal feature of experience; styles of play actually can tell us something about the people who engage in it. Again, this is not a totally new observation. María Lugones, for example, wrote about this in her well-known article on “world-traveling” and playfulness.<sup>9</sup> What it is like to be playful is not simply the same for everyone; it depends on one’s socialization, one’s ability to feel comfortable and “at home” in one’s circumstances, one’s gender training, and, I would add, one’s experiences with trauma.

### **TRAUMA AFFECTS SENSE OF REALITY**

One of the most dramatic realizations we had as we came to understand more about our children was that in some incredibly important ways they were not living in the same world, the same reality, that we were. In our world, parents are people who provide for the needs of children: they make sure that there is enough food (hopefully of healthy types), appropriate and clean clothing, and a home in which children are safe (except, of course, for the occurrence of ordinary pains or injuries). When anything bad happens, parents are not the ones who cause it, but

are the ones who provide comfort and remedy. Parents impose consequences for choices, but do not arbitrarily or unreasonably or unpredictably punish, or punish in hurtful or harmful ways.

This is perhaps an idealized picture, but again, we had had professional training and we had professional support in constructing our parenting and ourselves as parents, such that we were able to structure our parenting pretty intentionally right from the beginning. We were also older parents, and had taken a lot of time to think about what we believed parenting should be/do. And it is certainly not the case that we never made mistakes, or bad choices, with regard to parenting—I wish! But ultimately, in our world, parents were not people that children needed to be afraid of.

In our children’s reality, and the reality of so many children, parents are exactly the people to be afraid of, as well as the people who must be loved and depended on. When parents abuse children, they create a reality in which what children learn is that some people have the power to do to you whatever they want whenever they want, and you cannot escape it or prevent it (although you may learn to manipulate it or postpone it). What we had to learn to understand was that this was not simply their “picture” of the world; this was what was *real*, and they understood it to carry over into our home, the new home we had created for them. To put it differently, for children abused by their own parents, the monster in the room at night, under the bed, or in the closet, is absolutely, terrifyingly real, and it is also a person who has responsibility for their care. It is a person/monster, a creature with a dual nature, which may be loving at one moment and terrifying the next, inflicting pain and humiliation in the night and dropping them off at school the next morning, cheerfully waving at the teacher.

This also gives the world a dual nature, as abusers will also require that that part of the reality be kept secret. So abused children have to function in a secret reality as well as the “normal” one, in which no one knows (or admits to knowing) what is actually happening in the other. The requirement to repress that secret reality, coming from the abuser(s), is reinforced by the child’s own “internal necessities,” so to speak. That is, if a child is in an abusive situation they cannot escape from, in which they have to continue living with their abuser on a long-term basis, their own psychology will compel them to “compartmentalize” the abuse in ways that allow them to hide it, at least part of the time, from themselves as well as others. It is psychologically and emotionally extremely difficult for a child to live with the actual knowledge of ongoing abuse; Roland Summit, developer of the Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome model, says that the most healthy reaction a child can have to ongoing abuse is to block their own knowledge of it, as that knowing would be too difficult to live with.<sup>10</sup> In extreme cases, having to live in a dual reality compels dissociation; there is evidence that the majority of cases of multiple personality disorder stem from childhood sexual abuse at the hands of parents or other very close family members.<sup>11</sup>

Learning to understand the traumatic double reality of abused children is a staggering task, as it challenges

a parent’s own conceptions of the real and forces us to expand those conceptions in order to be able to accept and respond to our children’s pain, injuries, and needs. In some ways, the most difficult task of parenting traumatized children, especially those who have been traumatized in ways that are taken to be so forbidden that they are nearly unthinkable, is simply to accept that it has happened. So one implication of trauma for parents, and philosophers, is that it requires us to open ourselves to a reality that we do not want to admit; we do not want to admit that it is true, and we do not want to admit it into our lives. But the realities that abused children are experiencing must be admitted, must be validated, if anything about their lives is to change. If—when—the unimaginable does happen to children (or to adults), we must learn to believe in its reality. Perhaps we must say something even stronger: perhaps we must learn that *the “unimaginable” is already the real*, and it is our ideals about reality (that it is safe, that children are never hurt, that no one would do such things) that are, in fact, the not-real.

This discussion also has implications, I believe, for social and political (and moral) philosophy because it can help us articulate the wrongs of oppressions or oppressive actions. I take it to be uncontroversial that the abuse of children, in general and in particular by parents, is morally wrong, and that the wrongness of it is at least partially laid out in the foregoing discussion of how it requires the distortion of reality (only one feature of that wrongness, of course). If this is the case, we should be able to draw analogies with other forms of abusive control, such as the oppression and subjugation of specific groups of people under racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of “double consciousness” articulated in the work of W.E.B. du Bois<sup>12</sup> and used since then by many other critical theorists. Du Bois talks about the experience of coming to know oneself as black in a world ruled by anti-black racism as creating the sense of being forced to live a doubled life, with doubled thoughts and double duties, and presents this as harmful, as a “wrenching of the soul.”<sup>13</sup> He names among the effects of this doubling “a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality, and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence.”<sup>14</sup> These effects are very much what we see in the traumatized behavior of many who were abused as children, usually in an even stronger form. What that suggests is that we are looking at similarly *abusive* phenomena in various forms of oppression. This could gain us some added force for the condemnation of such phenomena, and although it would be wonderful to be able to say that we don’t need any such reinforcement because we are already in the post-race(ist), post-sex(ist) era, it seems to me that we have far too much evidence to the contrary. Thus I welcome any arguments that enable a more emphatic condemnation of oppression and oppressive practices.

### TRAUMA AFFECTS UNDERSTANDING OF “THE GOOD LIFE”

Although conceptions of “the good life” vary significantly from culture to culture, and even from person to person, what parents tend to hope for their children include things like finding ways of making life meaningful, having

enough at the very least (whatever that means), having relationships that are supportive and fulfilling, and being able and willing to act in ways that are morally responsible and permissible. This conception of a good life, however basic, may be challenging when children have been severely traumatized, especially if that trauma has affected or disrupted their developmental processes.

For one thing, a very common effect of trauma, at least in Western cultures in which time is understood as a linear path from distant past through present and into distant possible future, is referred to as the “foreshortening of the future.”<sup>15</sup> What this means is that traumatized (Western) children’s picture of the future may be no more than months or at most a couple of years, and they will have difficulty imagining themselves surviving/living to adulthood. Consequently, conceptualizing and planning for a good life, which in this culture seems to depend on being able to imagine a future, will simply be something they are not able to do and may not even be able to grasp the meaning of.

More than that, as important recent work in the neurosciences has shown, trauma affects the development of the brain, its neural pathways, and the connections among the different brain areas. What this means, for example, is that a traumatized child may have a much more difficult time than others in developing abilities like recognition of the relationship between causes and effects, or what are often thought of as the “intuitive” fundamentals of logic (another reason, in my judgment, to reject the claim that Western logic *is* intuitive, but that is another paper). This can be incredibly frustrating for parents, as these abilities are often taken to be simply “natural” and thus not considered to be something that is at stake when things go wrong. It may mean that no matter how many times you patiently (or not so patiently) go over the idea that if they do X, consequence Y will follow, and they do not want to have consequence Y, they will still do X and not be expecting or looking for the consequence. It may mean that they have a much more difficult time learning certain basics at school, both in terms of content they need to master, but also in terms of behavior: no matter how we struggled to help our children with homework, for example, once it was actually done, they were just as likely to leave it in their backpacks as to turn it in on time, because they didn’t really see that as part of the exercise, and didn’t recognize bad grades at the end of the semester as actually connected to anything they did with their homework months before. They simply couldn’t see that it mattered.<sup>16</sup>

These are frustrating problems for both parents and children, but the effects of inability to plan, to decide on a good and reasonable goal and then plan out the steps needed to get to the goal (and how to achieve each of those steps), seems to me only to become a bigger problem as children begin to grow to adulthood. As adults, we need to be able to manage our lives, and being able to plan and move through our plans in appropriate steps seems fundamental to that management. Living independently was a goal that was not difficult to “sell” to our children (they could hardly wait), but the idea that you have to have a plan to make it work continues to be much harder. Being able to get and keep a job is basic to this kind of

planning, but for some who have been traumatized, there may be nothing straightforward or easy about doing so. Keeping a job requires recognizing that there are direct consequences, usually negative, for not showing for a shift, or for blowing up at the boss, or for walking out because some fellow worker was giving you bullshit.

Of course, beyond recognizing that there will be consequences, keeping the job requires that you be able to care about the consequences as well. Again, for some who have been traumatized, this may be difficult to do. Being traumatized in circumstances of abuse, for instance, means that you have been violated and humiliated, terrorized and made to feel utterly helpless, utterly unable to assert yourself as an effective agent in any way at all. This experience may make it seem paramount to a survivor that they work to assert control in all circumstances that they can, even when doing so is actually going to work against their own interests in either the short or long term. That experience of helplessness can make it so that being in control of a situation, or of what consequences one will suffer, may seem more important than suffering any kind of consequences. This is one explanation of why some traumatized persons will work to “sabotage” their own interests. For example, when our children were still young, we learned that it was better to keep secret from them certain possibilities for good activities. We stopped telling them when a big trip was planned because their insecurities drove them to feel so anxious about whether they would do something bad and “lose” the opportunity to participate that they would inevitably go ahead and do the bad thing, just so that they could control when it was going to happen. They lost that opportunity, but they relieved their anxiety about it, and that seemed to be more important. Again, that was partly about the problematics of the future: any goal more than a few days out was too far away to be as important as a present anxiety.

What implications does this discussion have for philosophy? One is to remind philosophers that we tend to take for granted a certain kind of normative experience of the world, and forget to include in our analyses those experiences that are not normative, but that are statistically significant, as experiences of trauma clearly are. Any parents whose children are non-normative in almost any way know, for example, how our system of education is constructed to work best for those with a certain range of abilities and life experience, and how that system has very little room or help for “others,” often in spite of the efforts of caring teachers. In fact, in our roles as teachers, philosophers need to remember that the tendency to take a normative experience for granted affects our own ability to teach. As much as any teachers, we need to become much more aware of the needs of diverse learning styles, and to begin recognizing our responsibility to build into our classrooms more of the tools of, for example, trauma-informed pedagogies.

On a larger scale, if philosophy were taking seriously the experiences of the seriously traumatized, it would be able to render much more helpful analyses of, for example, the behaviors of other groups of “others.” Having had many such discussions with people unfamiliar with our children’s

experiences, I know that it is easy for many people to dismiss their difficulties with platitudes such as “that’s a problem that every kid has to struggle with” or even harsher “observations” such as “maybe they just need to learn not to be so lazy.” That makes me think about other groups to whom such “observations” have traditionally been attached, groups that tend to be marginalized on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and/or disability status, etc. But more understanding of trauma is leading experts in the field to theorize that oppressions, for example, are traumatizing. Is that, then, what we are often seeing when we look at members of marginalized groups and their struggles to “manage” their lives, to “live up to” the norms of the dominant culture? It makes far more sense to me to believe that oppressed groups struggle with the effects of trauma than that any group of people can truly be characterized as simply “stupid” or “lazy.” Philosophy could be applying its strengths here and helping instead of allowing injustices to continue.

### TRAUMA MAY AFFECT DESIRE

I noted in the last section that one effect of trauma may be that it can create in a survivor a desire to be in control that overrides any better kind of judgment about what to do in some circumstances. That is not the only way in which trauma can affect desire, and may not be the most problematic. I have discussed elsewhere at some length the ways that desire can be affected<sup>17</sup> but will repeat some of it here because it is so important for parents to realize that depending on what kinds of trauma children have suffered, their desires may become warped in ways that can deeply affect their relationships with adults as well as with other children.

I am speaking, of course, especially of sexual abuse of children. As noted above, when children are abused during their formative years, their developmental work is affected by trauma such that they form a sense of self through that trauma and its effects. One thing this may mean for sexually abused children, especially those abused over a prolonged time and/or by caretakers or close family members, is that they can come to understand sex as a “normal” part of relationship in general. If their basic relationships are sexualized, they may simply grow to understand that sex is how relationships are. If this is the case, they may then expect sex in relationships in general, and may attempt to sexualize any relationships that they enter into, with either other children or with adults.

If such a child is adopted, there is every likelihood that they would attempt to reestablish patterns of relation that they are familiar with in their new family situation; this is often referred to as “acting out sexually” and sometimes diagnosed as “sexual reactivity.” But what new parents need to understand is that they have to be able to respond to it not with disgust or revulsion but with understanding and tactics of support and correction. Normatively trained adults tend to find it extremely disturbing, or even downright unbelievable, that children, including very young children of three or four, are capable of having sexual feelings and expressing them toward others in direct and unmistakable ways. What those children will need from their new parents, however, is acceptance and

commitment to the work that will be required to help them move from inappropriate sexual expression to control over their very real sexual feelings and urges, in order to grow into a more appropriate stance toward those desires.

It is, presumably, obvious how important this is to the life of an abused child. If inappropriate sexual desires and activity are ignored and allowed to continue, the child may never learn to moderate those desires on their own, and will be likely to be frustrated by failed relationships throughout their life. Not understanding that sex is *not* a part of every kind of close relationship, they may attempt to impose sex on others (although it is also important to realize that *not* everyone who is sexually abused as a child abuses others as an adult), or drive others to reject them because of their tendency to inappropriately sexualize relationships. They are also more likely than others to be sexually victimized, as their “air” of sexual awareness tends to draw the attention of sexual predators, and they may not see their danger until it is too late.

One implication for philosophy regards the so-called liberal sexual paradigm, in which the tendency is to assume that anything done between consenting adults is fine,<sup>18</sup> and which in some articulations, like that of Thomas Nagel, claims that “bad sex is generally better than none at all.”<sup>19</sup> Again, because mainstream philosophy tends to assume a certain kind of normative experience, including a level of autonomy that may actually be unusual, the philosophy of sex has tended to assume both that consent is simply, obviously possible, and that once it has been “given” that no other worrisome questions remain to be asked. From my perspective, the fact of childhood sexual abuse and its effects means that consent in matters of sex is probably often nowhere near as free or as meaningful as it is taken to be. For those survivors who are helped to successfully recover from much of their experiences, it may be the case that they are capable of free and meaningful consent. But some do not recover, or do not recover fully or in every aspect, and a forceful demand for consent (which, let’s not kid ourselves, is too often how “consent” is manufactured) may easily defeat their autonomy. Further, given that we know that childhood sexual abuse is among the most underreported of crimes, we must also recognize that many survivors may have had little to no support or help in recovering at all, such that as adults they are still to some greater or lesser extent affected by the evils of that experience. Among these may well be that they have little of what it takes to stand up for oneself in the face of forceful, or “impassioned,” requests/demands for consent. We can take these implications of trauma seriously to indicate the need to revise, or at least complicate and problematize, the liberal model of sexual ethics in favor of one that requires a heightened responsibility to take care that our sexual actions do no harm, instead of just assuming that they cannot because we do not wish to believe that they do, as such a belief would require constraining them. The work of people like Catherine MacKinnon, one of the first to point out the insufficiency of consent for ethical sex,<sup>20</sup> and more recently Rebecca Kukla, who is developing a much more comprehensive model of consent within a framework of broader sexual communication,<sup>21</sup> is definitely moving in the right direction.

## FINAL WORDS

One final implication I will mention here is one that feminist philosophers and others have been urging for philosophy as a field for a long time now, and that is the importance of taking personal lives and personal experiences seriously, as well as learning how to properly value the lives and experiences of non-normative “others.” I do not believe that I would be able to articulate these reasons for philosophy to take trauma seriously if I had not had so much personal experience with it. My own experiences with trauma started me down my non-traditional philosophical path, but living with and through the experiences of my children made it impossible for me to ignore these implications for philosophy. How could I claim to understand the world if I did not understand the world my children were literally living in and held captive by? How could I claim to know the truth about who they were, and who I am in relation to them, if I did not know something at least of the truth of their experience? How could I think that I understood what is the good life for my children when I did not understand the extent to which the options for life had shrunk for them due to their trauma? Although I realize I have made far too many mistakes and have so much more to learn, I have at least begun to see how as a *philosopher* I cannot ignore marginalized experiences and still claim to be anything like an authority on the real, on knowing, on the good. Philosophy, and philosophers, need to learn how to believe in the realities of “others” in order to more properly understand reality in general, and to be able to do our own proper work.

## NOTES

1. “Call for Papers,” <https://sites.google.com/site/apacommitteonthestatusofwomen/publications> (accessed August 10, 2019).
2. See, for example, Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*; LaChance Adams and Lundquist, *Coming to Life*; Lintott, *Motherhood: Philosophy for Everyone*; Wilkie, *The Archaeology of Mothering*; Burchard, *Mothering in Trauma*.
3. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 96.
4. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 158–70.
5. Brison, *Aftermath*.
6. See, for example, Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Bowlby, *A Secure Base*.
7. Block, et al., “Failure to Thrive as a Manifestation of Child Neglect.”
8. Mackenzie and Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy*.
9. Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling and Loving Perception.”
10. Summit, quoted in Corwin, “An Interview with Roland Summit.”
11. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 120–26; for a compelling example, see Fraser, *My Father’s House*.
12. W. E. B du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
13. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 155.
14. Ibid.
15. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 47.
16. Of course, another huge reason why traumatized children have trouble with schoolwork is simply that the effects of trauma, including hyperarousal, keep their attention focused on trying to figure out where the next threat is coming from. This can leave little attention or energy for paying attention to actual schoolwork, which obviously is much less important from their perspective than the need to be aware of where trouble is going to come from next.
17. Burchard, “What’s an Adoptive Mother to Do? When Your Child’s Desires Are a Problem,” 138–70.
18. Soble, “The Analytic Categories of the Philosophy of Sex,” 16.
19. Nagel, “Perversions,” 42.
20. MacKinnon, *Butterfly Politics*.
21. Kukla, “That’s What She Said.”

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## On Muddling Through

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When Lauren Freeman approached me to write about my experiences combining parenthood and philosophy for this newsletter, I hesitated. Her invitation asked me specifically to talk about succeeding in academic philosophy while being a mother of four. I was reluctant in part because I worried that there's no way to write a piece like this without sounding like someone who thinks of herself as a success, either as a parent or a philosopher or both—which not only makes me sound like a jerk, but also seems like tempting fate. I changed my mind only when Lauren told me the horror stories she had heard from other senior women in the field: women who claimed, as part of an invited panel on “succeeding as a mother in the field” at a conference for women in philosophy, that there was no way to combine motherhood with a successful career in academia, that they regretted having children before they had tenure, or even at all. Lauren persuaded me that it is important for those who can do so to tell a more positive story, to help others see what is possible, so I (still rather tentatively) agreed.

My misgivings also stemmed from the fact that I am all too aware of the very many privileges that I had and still have, all of which enabled me to combine motherhood with philosophy to whatever degree of success I have attained in either domain. I was fortunate enough to land a tenure-track job relatively quickly—though, it must be said, not right away, and my first child was already almost three years old when that happened—and when I did, the job came with a scandalously low teaching load and a generous parental leave policy. While I was on the tenure track, I also had a very supportive female associate dean (shout out to Lenore Grenoble, wherever she is!). She helped me at a crucial pre-tenure moment, when I was pregnant with my third child, to take my maternity leave, pre-tenure research leave, and an external fellowship back to back. All of these advantages gave me two of the most precious gifts any aspiring academic with young children could ask for: flexibility and time. Without them, who knows how things might have turned out, or how I would feel now about my choices?

So I'm well aware of how lucky I've been. I also know that I'm far from unique. In my department at Penn State, I'm one of *three* women faculty with four children each; all three of us have tenure, one is an endowed chair, and one is department head. Although our department may be an outlier in this respect, I mention this in order to emphasize that there are other success stories out there as well.

Still, that's not to say that it has been easy. My oldest child was born two weeks after I defended my dissertation. I started my first job—a visiting assistant professorship at a small liberal arts college where I was replacing a faculty member who was going on parental leave—when he was three months old. I recognized, but didn't have much time to appreciate, the irony of the circumstances. We needed the income, and especially the health insurance

(my oldest was born with a heart condition that required extensive treatment), so I took the job and didn't look back. My second child was born when I was on the first year of the tenure track, the third in the middle of my pre-tenure period. My youngest was born several years after I got tenure, just as I was finishing my second book. Parenting young children is a challenge in the best of circumstances; doing it while in the midst of an academic job search and then later while working toward tenure is incredibly stressful, even overwhelming at times. My husband and I certainly upped the degree of difficulty by deciding to have four children—and yes, that was a conscious decision—as we still remind ourselves whenever we feel overwhelmed with juggling the demands of career and family.

I suspect it is obvious to most readers of this newsletter that the factors that make it so difficult to combine parenthood with academic work are structural. Some of those are pretty generic, having to do with the lack of support for paid parental leave and the lack of access to high quality, affordable childcare in the United States. Others are more specific to academia, most notably, the fact that we have to run the gauntlet of the tenure track during our prime childbearing years. To be sure, academia also offers one tremendous structural benefit over other professions: a greater degree of autonomy over one's work schedule. (I think this is a general benefit of academic work, but it is perhaps especially useful for those who have significant caregiving responsibilities, including parents of young children.) Still, I think it is fair to say that the deck is stacked against would-be academic parents, structurally speaking, and there is no such thing as an individual solution to a structural problem. Unless and until we get widespread structural change, the best individuals can hope for is to muddle through.

As a result, I would never presume to give advice to those who are hoping to combine parenting with an academic career. The most I can say is a bit about the things that I did that helped me to muddle through. And I would hope that readers will refrain from judging too harshly individual decisions made in an effort to live a good life under conditions of structural oppression.

We got as much daycare as we could afford. We were lucky to have access to very high-quality daycare, but it was expensive enough (especially for infants) that in the beginning “as much daycare as we could afford” meant three days a week, and even that was a stretch financially. In those first few years, my children went to daycare on my teaching days, and the other days I “worked from home,” which usually meant that I got up at 5 a.m. to grade or do class prep and then caught up on email during their naptime. There were definitely times when it wasn't clear that it made financial sense for us to spend so much money on daycare, given that, at the time, the cost represented a huge percentage of my husband's take-home income. Still, although he is a terrific father and very involved parent, my husband never had any interest in staying home full time, so we pressed on. Now, twenty years later, the payoff of that strategy is clear: having invested the time and energy early on, we *both* enjoy satisfying and successful careers.

Relying so much on daycare required me to get over my working-mother guilt. I'm still not sure where that guilt came from—perhaps from having been a teenager in the 1980s, at the height of the post-second-wave anti-feminist backlash—but I had definitely internalized the idea that women should feel bad about putting their kids in daycare so that they could focus on their careers. (Bonus side effect: reflecting on this and similar experiences helped to shape my own views about the importance of feminist ideology critique, which was useful for my research). I grappled with that guilt a lot in the first few years. I even felt insecure enough in my choices that I stopped speaking to my former college roommate after she (unthinkingly, I suspect) made a comment about how it is selfish for women to put their children in full-time daycare. (This was probably sometime in the early 2000s.) Whenever a female student of mine would say something like “I don't care which parent stays home with the kids, but one of them definitely should”—the “postfeminist” version of my college roommate's more traditional judgment—I bristled. (This came up more than once in my women's studies classes throughout the early 2000s, in the context of discussions of socialist feminist critiques of the gender division of paid and unpaid labor.) Looking back, I'm not sure exactly how or even precisely when I got over the guilt, but I did. Perhaps it was because it became increasingly clear how good daycare was for my kids—they had caring and experienced teachers, they learned a lot and made friends, they developed extremely healthy immune systems (as I said, we were fortunate to have access to high-quality childcare, which I know is not everyone's experience). Perhaps it was because I got more invested in my work as the years went on. Probably I was just too busy juggling work and family to notice that I felt guilty anymore.

Having my first child so early in my academic career forced me, I think, to become ruthlessly efficient with my time and realistic about my standards. If I had only two hours left before I had to leave to pick my kids up from daycare, then I finished that abstract in two hours. Generally speaking, I didn't continue to work in the evenings after getting home from my on-campus office. This was not so much out of a principled decision to concentrate on family time in the evenings, but rather because I was so exhausted after dinner, baths, and climbing Mount Bedtime (as my friend Johanna Meehan aptly puts it) that by the time that was finished there was no way I could summon the energy and focus required for intellectual work. Sometimes I'd get up early to try to work for an hour or two before the kids were awake; occasionally, this strategy would backfire because they would hear me up moving around and just wake up earlier, but often enough it worked. Still, this meant that my work hours were relatively constrained, so I had to learn very early on how to be as efficient and productive as possible within the time that I had. I think that skill has served me well even as my kids have gotten older and the demands on my time have shifted. I also long ago gave up on the ideal of perfection, either as a philosopher or as a parent. I've always been more of a finisher than a perfectionist—and I think that academia ruthlessly punishes perfectionists, whether they have children or not—but still I had to learn to let go of some of my unrealistic standards and expectations. Of course, that's not to say that I don't

take pride in my work nor is it to say that I don't strive to have good relationships with my kids (a task that is shifting now that they are starting to leave home). It is just to say that I learned that the best way to alleviate the more or less constant feeling of failure experienced by many working mothers was to let go of impossibly high standards in both domains. After all, if there is no such thing as an individual solution to a structural problem, then it makes no sense to berate oneself for failing to do the impossible.

As I said, I offer these reflections not as advice but rather as a report of my own experience, as I understand it. I realize that some of it may no longer be relevant—at any rate, I really hope that working mother guilt is a thing of the past—and lots of it is unique to me. Still, when people ask me—and it is mostly women who do this, usually younger women who are just starting to make their way in the profession—how do you do it? This is more or less what I tell them.

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## *Parenting, Feminism, and Academic Life: My Happy Story*

Samantha Brennan  
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

I'm Dean of the College of Arts and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guelph in Canada. In recent years, I co-founded and co-edited *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, an online, open access journal. Last year, I ended my three-year term as a member of the Canadian Philosophical Association executive (vice president, president, and past president.) I ride my bike long distances, I go back country canoe camping, and I race small sailboats. I also have three adult children. It amuses me that it's the last bit that makes people say “wow.” I often get asked, “How did you do it?” and I try to tell people that I didn't do it alone. I'm not a single parent. If I was, then the “wow” would be justified. I did it as part of a team and no other members of the team ever got the “Wow. How do you do you do it?” reaction. I think that says something about our expectations of mothers.

I've been reluctant to tell my happy story of combining an academic career with parenthood, largely because I know most people, especially most women, haven't had it so easy, and I hate for my story to be heard as “if I can do it, so can you.” But I have been struck, especially in comparison to women friends who became parents while practicing medicine or law, how much family friendlier my career was than theirs. I've also been struck by some pretty big differences between the shape of my life and that of my peers who struggle to find the balance between family life and an academic career. Don't get me wrong. There is a lot about parenting that I've found challenging, but very little of that relates to my job.

My kids, all adults now, are 21, 23, and 27. My daughter Mallory, the eldest, was born while I was in grad school, and my two sons were born not post tenure, but after I'd written and published enough to make tenure promotion pretty

clear. The decision to have a child in grad school made sense to me then. I was at home, with a SSHRC doctoral fellowship, writing my thesis. I still think now, as I did then, that I had a lot of time on my hands. As someone who worked almost full-time while going to school full-time as an undergrad, grad school felt positively relaxing timewise. What has changed is that I think I was lucky when it came to the “baby in grad school” decision. I had an easy, healthy, happy baby. She slept so much that I occasionally woke her up to take a break from my thesis. She didn’t cry much and loved being read aloud to no matter what the content, so I used to read journal articles on moral philosophy aloud to her. There may or may not be therapy bills later. She attended her first feminist philosophy retreat at six weeks of age, at Sandra Barty’s Michigan cottage to hang with the other feminist grad students. Mallory attended her first APA at nine months, and provided a lot of stress relief for worn-out grad students on the job market. In a way, having a child early set the pace. Starting at three months, she went to work every day with my partner and came home at lunch. I started work when they left and wrote furiously until noon. I wrote a lot of my thesis on that schedule. I’ve always had a good sense of being at work—kids are in daycare, school, etc.—and good sense of being off. My new challenge will be seeing if I can stop work leaking more into my life as I move into academic administration at the same time as the kids all leave the nest. Wish me luck!

I hear lots of women talk about how hard it is to be a mother and a professor but mostly the stuff that strikes me as hard isn’t intrinsic to either parenthood or academic careers, it’s about trying to do that in a country (the United States) with no parental leave, inadequate daycare, far away from extended family, usually being married to partners who don’t do their share, with unrealistic standards for how much work parenting requires. I think I’ve lucked out on almost all of these fronts.

Here are ten thoughts I have about what worked well for me and why. YMMV, as they say.

First, it’s significant that my partner in parenting had less workforce attachment than I did and do. He left his job to follow me from grad school to my first academic position and took advantage of the spousal tuition benefit to return to university. When he first went to work after graduating he worked mostly 9–5, Monday to Friday. I don’t agree with everything Rhona Mahoney has to say, but when I read *Kidding Ourselves: Breadwinning, Babies And Bargaining Power* (Basic Books, 1996) it made sense of certain facts about my life. It turns out I had taken her advice directed at women who want an equal share of household and family work, “educate up, marry down.” “Down” is harsh and it’s not true in all respects, but in terms of income, hours worked, and education it’s been I who have had more.

Second, I had a family in a country with real parental leave and good daycare. You can do a lot with paid parental leave and good daycare. It goes a long way. The university daycare and preschool were pretty important to me in the early years. It wasn’t cheap and there was a waiting list. We got in because my partner went back to school and university undergraduates got priority access to daycare.

We were also eligible for provincial daycare subsidies because between my student loan debt and Jeff being a student, our income was low enough to qualify in the early years. I could go visit my children for lunch if I had the time and we commuted to campus together. My university also had good policies around this. The tenure clock stopped automatically for my leave and though I didn’t need the extra time, I appreciated having it.

Third, I wasn’t the first woman faculty member in my department to have children. Indeed, Kathleen Okruhlik was chair when I was hired and dean shortly after, and she also had children. This was a switch for me. Dalhousie University, my first philosophy department, when I was an undergrad, had just one woman on faculty, and she was married but didn’t have children. My second department, University of Illinois at Chicago, where I went to grad school, had six women on faculty, but none of them had children until Dorothy Grover adopted her son in my final year. I think it made a difference not being first at Western. Even with this, though, the students didn’t always react well to seeing me on campus with small children. The funniest comment I’ve ever received on a teaching evaluation was “Professor Brennan cares more about her children than she does about us.” Right. A senior colleague once stopped by while I was having lunch in my office with my daughter and said he had no idea how I did it. His wife could have never managed being a professor while taking care of the house and the kids. (I didn’t say, though I thought it, “that’s because she’s married to you.”)

Fourth, you might have already noticed that I use the word “parent” rather than “mother” as I tried to sidestep a lot of gendered baggage that came with having children and living in a house. I used to think there would come a point in my life when I’d care about curtains and cutlery, but that hasn’t yet arrived. I’m still not a big fan of cooking—see [Sam dislikes cooking and she’s not alone](#). There’s a lot I didn’t do and still don’t do that lots of people think of as part of parenting for women. I’m glad I got through before the years of Pinterest and the mommy bloggers.

Fifth, my family is super supportive. My parents moved to the city where I was a professor to live with me and help with the kids when we were about to put a third child into daycare. We looked at the daycare bill. We looked at my mother’s current paycheck. We looked at how good she was with the kids and how much she missed them when she was back in Nova Scotia. We looked too at how exhausted and overworked we were. It just made sense all round. For more than twenty years we’ve lived side-by-side, in connected living spaces, helping each other out. “Help” is, of course, an understatement. My mother worked full-time keeping house, providing full-time care, watching the kids before and after school. She was paid for this work and went from full time to part time, from focusing mainly on the kids to mainly on the house, and just retired altogether last year. (True confession: She still does the laundry. However, she has grandkids who shovel snow and lift heavy things. We’re still a team.)

My father and my father-in-law did all the driving. At one point we’d send out Sunday night emails with chauffeuring

assignments for each grandfather. They loved it. The kids loved it too. Grandfathers, it turned out, will go for drive-thru fries after school. While they drove, I got to commute by bike.

Jeff's sister also moved just a few blocks away when the kids were young, and she was the aunt to whom the kids ran away when they'd had enough of their parents and their in-city grandparents.

Sixth, we've always thrown a lot of money at childcare. My kids spent a lot of time on campus in various camps and sporting clubs. Often it was pricey but it felt like money well spent. Why camps when we had the grandparents? We wanted to keep everyone happy for the long haul. We used to joke that it was easy to take care of any two of the three children together, but the three all at once were too much. During the summer one child at a time went to camp usually. Lots of the camps weren't really designed for working parents. Often, they ended at 2:30. That's where the grandfathers came in.

Seventh, the doors of our house were wide open. My Facebook description says that I am joyful about living as part of a large, extended family with porous boundaries and long tentacles. We've had a lot of friends, in addition to the extended family, who've played a significant role in the lives of our children.

As a young adult in my twenties, in grad school, I knew I wanted children in my life but I wasn't, yet, committed to the idea of becoming a parent. I was an idealist and I imagined, as I think many young people do, that my generation would do things differently. I thought of co-operative parenting, of communal living, and of alternative family arrangements. Instead, those friends having children also got married, and parenthood looked like this incredibly private, intimate thing. There was no easy access to the children of other people, and it seemed as if what I wanted was a more open model of parenting. I'd need to be the parent, inviting others in, rather than the other way round. In addition to our three biological children we've also opened our home through foster parenting, for a short period of time, to other children as well. During the teenage years, there was usually an extra child living with us. Often, they were friends of my gay son who had been thrown out of their own homes for a while or permanently. I was sad to find out how much this still happens.

Eighth, I know other parents did stuff that I didn't do even beyond the "mothering" point above. Now I see young academic couples who on principled grounds don't use daycare or after-school care. I can't imagine what that would be like. Deans tell stories about academic couples who say they need to end work at 4 p.m. every day so both parents (both!) can pick up the children. Both? After-school care? My partner started dubbing these extremely intensive parenting practises—no screens, only organic food, no daycare—as "artisanal parenting." These are the same young parents who only drink craft beer and listen to music on vinyl. He asks, "Do they knit and carve all their kids' toys too?" Maybe.

Nine, we travelled as a family on sabbaticals, and that is something I definitely recommend as both a great research experience and family bonding experience. Our kids had gotten to the ages where they spent more time with friends than with one another. Moving to a place where we were all new and learning our way around together made us feel more connected as a family. Our children became friends with one another again.

Tenth, babies and toddlers were easy compared to teenagers but not for the reasons most people think. In many ways, I loved having a house full of teenagers. So energetic, so earnest. But it was work. Babies and toddlers have pretty simple needs. I also think lots of different people can meet those needs. My kids, when young, loved being with lots of different adult caregivers. And even if it was me providing the care I could have my mind on other things. You can walk a baby in a stroller and think about philosophy. You can read toddler books and think about something else. Teenagers wanted and needed my actual full-on attention. One morning I was woken by a teenage child sitting at the edge of my bed. "It's five o'clock. You sometimes get up at 5 so I figured it was okay to wake you. I haven't been able to sleep. I've been thinking. Why is the world so shitty? Why is life worth living?" We got up and made waffles and drank orange juice and talked about some hard stuff. They all wanted to talk about friendship and about relationship problems. And about ethical problems and about politics. I spent all night at the ER once with a high school-aged kid, not mine, who had taken too much of something and wasn't breathing properly. He wouldn't tell me his last name and my kids claimed to not know it. They just went to school together. I was giving a talk at the Canadian Society for Practical Ethics the next afternoon. I did it on just a few hours of sleep.

I actually wish there had been parental leave for parents of teenagers. I needed it.

With teenagers it wasn't the kind of parenting you can pay someone else to do. You're on, a lot of the time, and it's messy and complicated and I don't think I thought too much about how messy and complicated life is when I decided to have children.

Oh, they also talked my parents' ears off.

I know this is not your usual woman-academic-with-kids story. My family is more easily recognizable to other immigrant families with its multigenerational lifestyle. My parents were able to move from the east coast to Ontario in part because there was no other family in Nova Scotia. They'd moved from England to Canada in the 1960s and all of their extended family is in England or Australia. Last fall, my mother and I (my dad died a few years ago) celebrated fifty years in Canada. It helps too that my parents weren't wealthy. The deal where my mum took care of my kids was good all round. We all benefited. They got a lot more time with the grandkids. We got time to ride bikes and sail boats. And I had, and still have, a happy work-life balance as a philosopher.

## *Bridging the Divide: Thoughts on Parenting as a Grad Student*

Carol Gray

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

I am a feminist, an activist, an attorney, a graduate student, a wife, and a mother. There are a few other labels I could add, but the point is, like others who are parents and graduate students, I constantly feel torn between these two roles. There is never enough time to do either role as I would like to do them, and I regularly feel guilty for falling short in both arenas. But parenting has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life, and I believe it can fit well with graduate work most of the time. Here I will offer some stories and tips on how to navigate and sometimes bridge parenting and graduate work.

### **FINDING THE TIME**

Though grad school demands one's full attention, one cannot put parenting on hold. When I started my PhD in political science, my son, Cameron, was nine years old. He is now fifteen years old. His childhood has passed while I've been in grad school. Perhaps the greatest challenge for parenting in graduate school is finding enough time to be the kind of parent I want to be and to complete the volumes of work required for graduate school. Before I started grad school, I would read aloud with my son before bed, taking turns reading as we plodded our way through *Oliver Twist*, *Little Women*, *Little Men*, and others. Grad school started when we were in the middle of *David Copperfield* and we never finished the book. I gradually shifted to singing Cameron a song before bed instead of reading because that 45–60 minutes of reading meant one hour less sleep. I just couldn't risk getting less sleep because of the 15–20 hours of driving I was doing every week commuting to school. Before grad school, I tried to arrange my adjunct teaching schedule such that I could be home when my son got home from school so I could hear about his day. But grad school meant I was away so much more . . . missing so much more of his life. When I was at school, I'd try to find a break right after the time when the school bus dropped Cameron at home with his father so I could call and hear about school over the phone. I learned about many important events by voicemail ("Mommy, I qualified for the State Geography Bee today!"). Phones have been my lifeline for parenting. When I couldn't attend his parent/teacher conference in person, I worked out with my husband to have me on speakerphone as I called in from school. When a doctor's appointment was during a seminar I was taking, I explained to my professor in advance that I would need to step out of the seminar at the time of the appointment after my husband texted me that he was in the doctor's office. And there I was again on speakerphone asking the many questions I would want to ask that my husband, who is quite reserved, would not want to ask.

One of the hardest things is when there's just no way around the conflict. The class I taught as a GA was on the night of my son's band concert. When I'd arrive late for soccer games, I dreaded the question Cameron inevitably

asked after the game: "Were you there when X happened?" [sometimes a goal or great play at the beginning of the game]. When I'd have to admit I didn't get there until after that, his facial expression would drop in disappointment and I would sink with guilt.

Harder still was the guilt of losing my patience because I was just so tired and stressed with the workload. I had the good fortune of having a mother who almost never raised her voice with me. I fell short so many times with Cameron in this regard, regularly apologizing afterwards and recommitting to doing better next time. But doing better was usually contingent on getting at least 7-8 hours sleep, a rarity for me in grad school. I struggled against chronic sleep deprivation because of school, my almost 1.5-hour commute each direction, and trying to keep up with parenting responsibilities. Fortunately, my husband and I share parenting duties. He drives Cameron to soccer practices and theater rehearsals; I drive him to piano and oboe lessons and orchestra rehearsals. Sometimes I am so tired that I take a nap during the oboe lesson or I have to pull over to sleep when driving to or from school. I keep one of our inflatable camping bedrolls in my drawer at my office and nap at school sometimes to be able to drive home safely.

The teenage years made the effects of sleep deprivation even harder. My politics have always been to teach my son to question authority. During the teenage years, that authority was usually me. My husband was always the easy-going one, leaving the discipline to me. Cameron inherited my strong will and tenacity. His determination and litigious debate style of arguing (. . . I wonder where he got that from . . .) was a formidable test for my sometimes threadbare nerves.

As I'm entering the job search phase of my graduate years, parenthood has meant that I can't apply for any jobs that are more than an hour or so from our home. Our son is in a good high school, so our lives are very much rooted to the school system, the soccer team, the local theater program, the orchestra where he plays the oboe, etc., etc. Uprooting teens in high school isn't advisable. I decided long ago that I may need to be jobless for a year or two after I finish my PhD until my son goes away to college and I can then be on the national job market.

Though juggling grad school and parenting has been challenging, I have found some strategies to be helpful. Here are my tips and the stories behind them.

### **BRING YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL**

To try to minimize the alienation of having my school world so separate from my son's world, I've looked for ways to expose him to my school world. I look for events at the university that would be good family entertainment. A couple times during the summer, my husband, son, and I travel more than an hour each way to attend a musical at my university. With my student ID, I get two student tickets, so the entertainment is both fun and affordable. When there is a snow day at my son's school, I bring him to school with me. For classes that I'm a student in, I speak to the professor in advance to make sure they are ok with me

bringing my son. They have all been very accommodating. This has meant that when I'm at home talking about a class, I can say, "Cameron, that's the class with Ernie that you went to, remember?" A couple times I have taken Cameron to classes I'm teaching, particularly if it's a fun activity. I create a jeopardy game to help my students prepare for quizzes, and my son sometimes comes to be the score keeper. Cameron likes to meet my students and my students seem to like to meet him.

### **SCHEDULE CLASSES AROUND FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

I made a point of scheduling classes that would maximize my family time. Thankfully, the professor who oversees graduate students at my university has been very accommodating, always scheduling my teaching for classes that meet one night a week. This meant I only missed one evening with my family and was still home in time to see Cameron before he went to sleep. In terms of classes I took as a student, I sometimes opted not to take classes I would have enjoyed because they met at 6:30 p.m. and would have meant I didn't see my son at all that day. I also managed to avoid Friday classes several semesters, which meant I was available to volunteer as a chaperone for my son's school field trips.

### **MAKE IT UP TO THEM**

It is inevitable that grad school will mean that during crunch times, I just don't see much of my son and husband. I may miss my son's bedtime routine because I have a paper due at 10 p.m. and even that 15 minutes at bedtime is more than I can spare. The summer I was taking my two comprehensive exams, I planned a five-day vacation with my family at the beginning of the summer, then studied for the rest of the summer and went to a hotel to take my exams so that I could be away from family distractions. Leaving them for those exam days seemed far better than failing and having to go through more grueling months of studying. Thankfully, my study plan worked and I passed both exams the first time. I told my advisor at the end of that summer that the following summer I had to make it up to my family. And I did. We spent weeks driving across country visiting national parks. We listened to many books on tape from *Sherlock Holmes* to *The Adventures of Origami Yota*, and all of the *Harry Potter* books.

Our national park odyssey meant that I made little progress on my dissertation that summer, but it was one of the best things I've done in my life. When I hear my son talk to friends about his big national park summer, I know I made the right choice. Creating those childhood memories will hopefully help him forgive me for all the times I wasn't there or wasn't as patient as I should have been. One thing I have accepted is that it will probably take me longer to complete my PhD because I'm trying to be a good parent at the same time, and that takes time. Fortunately, I'm still expecting to be able to finish my PhD within the years of funding provided by a fellowship that I've received. I'm also fortunate that I'm on this journey with my husband so we are not dependent on just my income.

### **TRY TO KEEP UP FAMILY TRADITIONS; BUT CUT YOURSELF SLACK WHEN YOU CAN'T**

We've tried to keep our regular family traditions despite the intensity of graduate school. Every year I take my son trick-or-treating and help support him in creating his own Halloween costume. We plan a birthday party at some new location each year (e.g., at a hiking trail, a science museum, a corn maze, etc.). We have been pretty good about keeping Friday night as our "family movie night," rotating who in the family gets to pick the movie of the week. (One professor in my department suggests that all grad students and professors take one day off from work each week to be able to come back fresh, rejuvenated, and more productive.) But sometimes we just haven't had the energy and time to keep up with family traditions. One year, we didn't get a Christmas tree because it was so late in the season and we were going away soon after Christmas anyway. We all realized we were just too tired, and it was too much work, so we would be happier not adding that "one more thing."

### **FIGURE OUT WAYS TO BE TOGETHER**

Children, like parents, often just want to find time and ways to be together. Sometimes I've been able to do this while doing things I had to get done for school. When I had to drive the one hour to school to return library books that were due, I invited Cameron to come and we'd go out to pick up some food afterwards. Sometimes we'd go to the science museum and I would bring my articles along to read while he learned and explored. At least we were there together. Now that Cameron is in high school, he has a lot of homework like me, so we plan homework outings where we study at the local bookstore that doubles as a library.

One of the ways I've been able to maximize time with my family has been by doing my homework in the car while commuting. I get some books in Kindle form and I email myself PDFs of articles. Then I use the voice-over feature of my iPhone to have a monotonous mechanical woman's voice read my assignments to me. With courses that are electives, I sometimes request the syllabus before registering to see how many of the books I can get in Kindle format so I can know if I will be able to complete reading while commuting.

To an outsider it might seem that my roles as parent and grad student are compartmentalized. I usually don't talk in my graduate seminars about my role as a mother. I usually don't talk at my son's soccer games about what I'm learning about Fanon and decolonialism or how to rethink feminism in a context that is not dominated by white, Western thought. My hour and 15-minute commute from Massachusetts to the University of Connecticut is my transition between these two worlds. But in truth, I'm almost always living in both worlds at the same time. And therein lies the challenge as well as the richness of parenting in grad school.

## *Anthropologists from Mars*

Leigh Viner

INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTHEAST

It's a Sunday evening and students start appearing at our door, bearing cheese, crackers, grapes, beer, books tucked under arms, bringing friends, some nervous, some excited, some cool and confident. They greet me and chatter with each other as we unwrap the snacks and pour drinks. Everyone finds a spot in the living room on couches or cross-legged on the floor, and we start to discuss the text we've chosen that month. My son comes in, listens for a while, chats with the students, grabs some cheese and crackers, then leaves. One evening at the end of Reading Group, he invites everyone to his room and we have a round of Rock Band with our new colleague, the Kant scholar, providing a karaoke rendition of Radiohead's *Creep*. It was hilarious and wonderful, the essence of community.

One summer, a student loaned me his *Sex and the City* DVD collection. I binge-watched the whole series during break, my twelve-year-old son seemingly not paying attention on the couch with his laptop. Years later, when he was in college, he rewatched the series with his partner and housemates, and I discovered that he knew and loved every character, their relationships, friendships, and story arcs. When asked by one of his professors to program the university's international film festival, he quietly and without fanfare chose only films directed by women.

My son is grown up now, and living in New York City with his partner. But over the years, I described parenting him as feeling like an anthropologist from Mars, with him as my assistant. Philosophers, like artists, always seem to be simultaneously inside and outside of society's conventions, inside and outside of our own experiences. And my good fortune at finding a full-time position at a regional campus of a state university, with its emphasis on teaching and service, allowed me to provide a simple but stable life for us, with plenty of free time to take naps and walks, watch movies, play music, and talk about life together.

The philosophers that I read, teach, and write about are the ones whose ideas fuel and shape my life and imagination, and are therefore the ones who have shaped my parenting as well. Too many to list, but generally, they're the philosophers who value art, play, freedom, dignity, and openness. I was trained in the history of philosophy, with a focus on the ancient Greeks. Then, through teaching, I explored and grew, following my curiosity and the needs of the program. But it was my son and my students who led me to feminism. Like all women, I've had to deal with injustices and indignities over the years, which I usually tried to ignore or rise above. But, coming to a new understanding of those experiences, seeing them as they were reflected back to me through the eyes of people I love and care for, and who love and respect me, made it necessary to confront those issues differently, more directly, more deeply, and more honestly, both for my sake and for theirs. So the simplest and most powerful truth is we learn at least as much from our children and from our students as they do from us, if we're doing it right.

## *Raised in Philosophy*

Eli Kukla

MCGILL UNIVERSITY

I am a "pure-bred" philosophers' kid; both of my parents are philosophers. I am also a second-generation philosophers' kid, as my grandfather is also a philosopher. So, growing up, I was even more surrounded by philosophy than most philosophers' kids, and my immersion in the discipline has affected seemingly every aspect of my life and personality. My philosophical upbringing is seen on the surface level of my personality. It shows in my sense of humor, my rhythm of speech, my style of argumentation, and in the ways in which I ask questions. It manifests all the way down to the fundamental way in which I think, reason, consider evidence, and evaluate claims. Being raised by philosophers has also shaped how I move around the world and my relationship with academia and college campuses in general.

We who have been inducted into philosophical norms and habits (I say "we" because of my social and intellectual integration into the field, though not my academic one, as not only am I not a philosophy PhD or grad student, but I'm a linguistics major at McGill) have such a distinctive manner of speaking and communicating. Our senses of humor, our verbal ticks, our communicative cues: it's all so unique to philosophy and makes us instantly recognizable. You may even be seeing these communicative cues while reading this, what with my long digression explaining the context of my use of the first person when talking about philosophers.

The very rhythm and flow of how I speak was shaped from the beginning by philosophers, and it's a rhythm and flow of speech that I have personally found to be ubiquitous among—and exclusive to—philosophers. We preface our speech to provide specific contexts to what we're saying. We have a distinctive pattern of changing the speed at which we speak, speaking very quickly for certain parts of our sentences and then pausing to carefully consider which word needs to come next. We digress to try to clarify and to justify specific seemingly minor aspects of what we're saying. When trying to convince someone of something, we continue to give reasons for our arguments long after they've already agreed, just to show that we have every counterargument and varying aspect of the issue covered.

Speaking "Philosopher" almost feels like speaking a specific dialect. For example, philosophers often have a distinctive way of having friendly arguments which contrasts with how we have non-friendly arguments. The friendly argument does not come from a place of hostility or anger, but is instead used as a kind of marker that the person you're arguing with is smart and interesting and has things worth saying. Non-philosophers, however, often can't tell the difference between these two kinds of arguments, and therefore confuse the friendly argument with a non-friendly argument. This means that people who don't speak the "Philosopher" dialect can sometimes perceive philosophers as overly confrontational or critical, similar to how non-New Yorkers hear the New York dialect and conclude that New Yorkers are rude and harsh.

These are all things that as philosophers, we may never realize we do until it's pointed out to us, but once we recognize the pattern of the "Philosopher" dialect, it makes others with a philosophy background instantly identifiable. I know that for me, growing up surrounded almost exclusively by philosophers, it took me until around grade school to realize that no other people, neither my peers nor my teachers, talked like that, and that I had a distinctly unique or odd cadence to my speech, from their perspective.

The most paradigmatic example of our dialect that I've ever heard was a quote from my grandfather, also a philosopher, who is currently living in an eldercare home in Toronto. He suffers from very serious Parkinson's, so any kind of communication is extremely difficult. We asked him, not really expecting an answer, "So, how do you like the nurses here? Are they doing a good job?" to which he, speaking slowly and laboriously and fighting through the Parkinson's, managed to say, "I haven't interacted with them enough to formulate a proper inductive base yet."

Not infrequently, I'll be faced with one of those boring conversation-starter questions by friends or something. You know the type, someone will disinterestedly say something like "if you could be any animal, what animal would you be?" to which I, in the way that only philosophers do, would respond with something like "well, I don't really have an epistemic framework from which to answer your question,"—this would usually be met with a chorus of groans and eye rolls—"Do I get the animal's brain and thoughts? In which case I don't care what animal I am because whatever animal I choose wouldn't have the capabilities to appreciate its being that animal . . ." and I'd usually go on from there.

These patterns and rhythms of speech, argumentation, humor, and questioning have all been things that were imparted to me by virtue of growing up around philosophers. I've used the dialect metaphor a couple times, not only because of my personal interest in language and linguistics, but because I think it's a really apt comparison. Like imparting a dialect, teaching me to speak and reason in this way wasn't a conscious choice of my parents, but rather an inevitable consequence of my growing up around them. However, there were other ways in which my parents chose specifically to use philosophical principles and thinking to parent me. My mother in particular was very careful not to prescribe rules or assumptions without proper and convincing evidence. So there was never an attempt to control my behavior with reasons or excuses like "because I said so" or "that's just the way it is."

Most people, at some point in their lives, reach a point where they question many of their assumptions about life. People question religion, sexuality, monogamy, traditional family structures, gender, et cetera. But for me, being raised by philosophers, I never started out with any of these assumptions to begin with. I never reached a point where I questioned religion, because I wasn't given any convincing arguments for the existence of a God in the first place. I never had to question the value of monogamy because I was never raised to assume that it was the only

way for a relationship to be, even though it's the norm. I was exposed to all sorts of non-traditional family structures, various sexualities, gender identities, and beliefs and left to decide for myself their value. It was never assumed (by my mother, anyway) that I was straight or that I was cis, and she never treated me as though those were a given. (I discovered for myself over time that, at least as of writing this, I am not straight, but I do happen to be cis.)

This parenting method of teaching me not to accept things without valid reasons did give me a fierce disdain for unquestioned authority, much to the dismay of many of my teachers throughout grade school. I would particularly anger certain teachers by my unflinching refusal to participate in the morning Pledge of Allegiance during elementary and middle school. Multiple times, I was told to stand up to say the pledge and would be met with flustered disbelief or confusion when I would argue back about the racism and neo-colonialism of dogmatic American Exceptionalism, or my many reasons for not wanting to perform support for the United States or American interests.

Of course, my argumentation got more sophisticated over time, and by eighth grade I was much better able to express why I refused to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance than I was during fourth grade (the first time I had to say it). However, although I didn't have the vocabulary or sophistication yet to explain why I had problems with the pledge, I knew that there was something about it that I found weird, unnecessary, and creepy. I knew this because of how my philosopher parents raised me to never accept something at face value, and to question unsubstantiated authority and assumptions.

Socially, being a philosopher's child gave me an interesting and unique community and set of relationships all over the world. I remember a while ago I was trapped unexpectedly in Toronto due to a snow storm, and philosophers from the University of Toronto took me in on short notice late at night. The experience got me thinking about how many connections I could have through philosophy all over the world. There are very few cities where I could be trapped and have no connections to anyone. Philosophy, as a field, is just the right size to enable this. Larger fields like English or biology don't have the same kind of intimacy as philosophy. Philosophers tend to know each other, either personally or by their work, and seem to be quite well connected over social media. With a smaller and less well-represented field, there is that same interconnectedness and intimacy as in philosophy, but you wouldn't be able to count on connections in every city in the same way.

Growing up accompanying my mom while she gave various talks or went to conferences in so many cities, I've come to view college campuses, and even more specifically philosophy departments, as little centers of my community all around the world. I've visited campuses in Bogotá, Johannesburg, Hong Kong, Beirut, Paris, and more, and in each of these places I've found some sense of home and belonging in them. I like to think of my relationship to campuses and philosophy departments sort of like Chinatowns. Almost everywhere seems to have one, and no matter how foreign or unfamiliar a place may feel,

Chinatowns all tend to have a similar feel and sense of welcoming familiarity. Being raised a philosophers' kid has allowed me to have this feeling of a familiar community enclave almost anywhere I go.

Being a philosophers' kid also certainly helped me easily integrate into university life, and it helped me absolutely crush my first formal philosophy class I ever took, Social and Political Philosophy. But for me, being a philosophers' kid is more than that; it's a sense of self. Philosophy to me is more than a career or a department; philosophy is an identity.

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## Children, Parenting, and the Nature of Work

Lauren Freeman  
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

This morning at breakfast, in the context of absolutely nothing, my five-year-old daughter looked at me, incredulous, and said, "Wait, you're a teacher *and* a mother? How do you do everything? That's so much work!"

I just stared. I was dumbfounded at how her question and comment so clearly hit upon the truth. I was both surprised and grateful that she recognized that. I hadn't been complaining about a deadline that I'd missed this week, or how behind I was in preparing for my classes and grading, nor had I so much as mentioned all of the seemingly insurmountable tasks I'd set out for myself that day. In fact, it was in a very rare moment of silence at our breakfast table that for some reason unknown to me, she came to that realization.

It made me think about a somewhat similar episode from several months earlier. I was invited to be a community visitor at my son's tiny elementary school. I'd visited the previous year, with great success, and I agreed to return to do some philosophy with the children. It is a classical school, a rare place where I can ask a room of five- to eight-year-olds, "Who is considered to be the first Western philosopher?" and without skipping a beat, they all screamed out, "SOCRATES." Floored (that either they'd remembered my time with them from last year, or that they were drawing upon their own four-month study of Ancient Greece), I followed up with "and who was his most famous student?" "PLATO!!!" they all yelled, smiles abound. After making a silly joke distinguishing Plato from Play-doh (they found it to be funny), I continued to ask who Plato's most famous student was and all I could hear, in joyous unison, was, "ARISTOTLE."

This led to our discussion of the good life. Within that context, we talked about the value of community and the nature and value of work. In order to do this, we read a children's classic, Leo Lionni's 1967 book, *Frederick*.

The protagonist is Frederick, an idiosyncratic little field mouse. All through autumn, while his friends and family

are busy collecting food and supplies to last them through the cold winter, Frederick is off by himself, doing his own thing—to some, doing nothing. He collects rays of the sun for when it's cold; colors, for when it's dreary; and words, for when conversation runs out.

Predictably, by the end of winter, all of the food and supplies that the field mice had collected in autumn are gone. They start to wither. But Frederick warms them by summoning rays of the sun in their imaginations ("or is it magic?"), brightens their days by reminding them of the glorious colors of nature, and recites verse, invigorating their minds, getting them through until spring.

Frederick, we learn by the end, is a poet.

After I finished reading the book, I asked the children a series of questions about the nature and value of work, in order to test their intuitions about these ideas. As adults reading this book in a capitalist society, we tend to think that "work" is what you get paid to do, what you can "cash in on" in terms of tangible or monetary rewards. The questions I was asking were meant to problematize for the children the nature of *valuable* work by bringing them to think about what kind of work is valuable in itself (and not just for some monetary or extrinsic gain).

To my shock and joy, the children had very different intuitions than I thought they'd have. In fact, to my utter delight, the majority of them had profoundly feminist intuitions.

They all believed, from the outset and without any convincing from me, that Frederick's work—collecting rays of the sun, and colors, and words—was inherently valuable. Moreover, when I played the devil's advocate and asked them to convince me that Frederick's work was valuable (I was essentially asking them to construct an argument to this effect), as if it was *the most obvious thing in the world*, they told me that it's absolutely necessary to collect rays of the sun, *for how else will the mice stay warm in the cold winter?* They also told me that it's entirely necessary to collect colors, *for we need them to brighten our lives in the grey of winter* (they looked out the window). And, finally, they pointed out to me what was obvious to them (this is a classical school after all; every Friday they spend half an hour learning and reciting poetry together), that poetry is an important part of the good life *and* valuable work. It seemed almost absurd to them that I was belaboring this point. To them, it was all commonplace.

Their argument about work, if I may be so bold as to reconstruct it, was that care work is work and that it's inherently valuable. Frederick was caring for his friends and his community; it was Frederick who got the field mice through the winter by invigorating their imaginations. And the children recognized this kind of work as being of supreme value.

I then brought the discussion back to their own lives. I asked them what work they see around them in their families and communities that they think is valuable. And again, to my delight and surprise, so many of them remarked upon how

their parents do the really hard work of raising them and caring for them and their families. What struck me is that children really and truly valued the care work that is done for them and only secondarily mentioned the “real jobs” that their parents have.

The other day I was teaching a class in my feminist bioethics course and we were talking about vulnerability and dependency. We were talking about the various ways in which feminist bioethicists draw attention to the ways in which the work of caregiving in our society, that primarily and not accidentally tends to fall on the shoulders of women, is neither rewarded, nor recognized, nor valued.

But then I thought of my daughter’s comments at breakfast, and the intuitions and strongly held beliefs of the children in my son’s school, and the deep value they see in the care work that surrounds them, and, like Frederick, I thought that maybe the rays of light to be found in the future will sustain us.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Learning from My Daughter: The Value and Care of Disabled Minds*

Eva Feder Kittay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Reviewed by Lisa Tessman  
BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

Eva Feder Kittay’s *Learning from My Daughter* is, in my view, her best work to date. As I read, I felt I was being guided through a varied terrain—some of it familiar, some unfamiliar—by someone who is much wiser than I am. Kittay’s experience—of loving and caring for both a daughter with severe cognitive and physical disabilities and a son who is not disabled—motivates and informs the book in crucial ways, while her philosophical mastery allows her to think through and convey with clarity the insights that this experience yields. The book made me realize that, as someone who has not raised a disabled child, I have much to learn from Kittay’s experience. But I also realized that having had the experience of raising *any* child—and thus the experience of loving exactly the child I have, and loving her exactly the way she is—I can understand and assent to pretty much everything Kittay proposes in her book, for it all follows in a sort of obvious and irrefutable way from such love.

The book is divided into three parts. I found Part I to be the most profound—it is truly on what matters. Part II is a superb example of powerfully argued analytic philosophy. Part III is a significant and innovative contribution to care ethics.

For readers like myself who accept and appreciate some of the basic premises of Harry Frankfurt’s work (in, for instance, “The Importance of What We Care About” and *The Reasons of Love*), Part I of Kittay’s book can be read

as a tremendous deepening of the Frankfurtian position. For Kittay, as for Frankfurt, what really matters depends on what matters to *us*, which is to say what we love and care about. The value of a person’s life is not to be found in any of its objective properties; rather, it is through valuing that we confer value. The life lived by a person with disabilities matters—in exactly the same way that an able person’s life matters—because they value their own life, and also because their life matters to those who love them. It really is this simple. Valuing her daughter, Sesha, has given Kittay a different, more expansive, answer to the question of what matters than that offered by traditional philosophical accounts that center narrowly on Reason.

Sesha’s life is a good life—but saying this requires a reexamination of the concept of the normal, because given the tendency to conflate the good life and the normal life, it might seem that a life that is not normal also cannot be good. When “the” good life is based on either a statistical norm or an ideal modelled by those who “exceed” the statistical norm in some way, people like Sesha appear to be living lives of lesser value. One might think that to resist the conflation of the good life with the normal life, disability advocates would want to abandon norms altogether and adopt, perhaps, an entirely subjective account of what a good life is. Kittay argues against this, instead examining why a desire for the normal persists, and finding that the desire for the normal is “a desire to have one’s own worth and that of one’s children confirmed” (33). The subjective experience of what constitutes a good life remains central in Kittay’s account—and so what Sesha cares about is what matters the most to the question of what makes her life good—but because value is also constructed socially, it is important for what we each value to also be valued by others, or put differently, for others to recognize the value of what we value. Within her family, Kittay created a “new normal,” but because recognition from those beyond the family is also vital, Kittay argues that, socially, we need to create “more capacious norms . . . that embrace more varieties of flourishing and that generate their own source of desirability” (41).

Part II of the book takes up a set of questions about whether or not one is morally permitted (or required) to use reproductive technology to select either for or against disabling traits. While Kittay affirms that there can be good reasons to select against an impaired fetus in certain cases—making it permissible—they are not the reasons cited in the most common arguments; and thus, one of her main points is that there are problematic ways to approach the topic, found in some arguments for the claim that it is obligatory to select against disability. The idealizing methodologies behind these arguments tend to trigger the wrong intuitions, which then appear to confirm the assumption that the lives of people with disabilities are less good than the lives of people without disabilities. This sends a message that is both wrong and harmful to people with disabilities—that their lives are of lesser value and that they are not welcome in the world. Disability theorists have developed the “expressivist objection” not only to this type of argument, but also to any argument that supports the permissibility of selecting against disability. While Kittay endorses the expressivist objection when it

is applied to the kind of argument she has critiqued, she insists that not *all* reasons for engaging in prenatal testing and selection express the view that the lives of people with disabilities are of lesser value. In particular, she believes that a woman who is carrying a fetus may permissibly select against disabling traits if she decides that, while the life of a child with disabilities is as valuable as any other human life, when she takes into consideration whether she is capable of caring for a child with disabilities, whether she is willing to subordinate the rest of what she cares about, including her work and her other commitments, to the needs of a child with disabilities, whether it is the right time in her life to undertake this kind of care, how it will affect her other children, and so on, there may be good (all things considered) reasons to avoid carrying a fetus with disabling traits to term. Of course, disability is stigmatized, and not enough resources are directed to supporting people with disabilities and those who care for them—and it is in the context of these injustices that a pregnant woman must make her decision about whether to raise a child who is likely to have disabilities. This should be remedied. But even if it were, there are additional burdens to consider, including the emotional difficulty of caring for someone who is extremely vulnerable and dependent. In keeping with a feminist commitment to reproductive choice, a woman must be able to choose—without moral disapprobation—whether or not she accepts the burdens of *any* particular pregnancy. Nevertheless, Kittay reports on an important disagreement with her non-disabled son who gives several arguments in support of the expressivist objection. There is one point that he raises from his perspective as the sibling of a person with disabilities: a parent who selects against an impaired fetus runs the risk of communicating to any of their existing children that they are not loved unconditionally—they, too, would have been aborted had they had impairments. Kittay argues that loving unconditionally—whatever child one ends up with—is compatible with aiming to select against disabling traits (as long as one does so for the sorts of good reasons named), for *all* attempts at selection must be made with full awareness that our control is limited: whom we love, and whom we care for, is very much a matter of luck. An existing child is indeed to be loved unconditionally; a fetus, on the other hand, is not yet in-relation until someone accepts the role of caring for them in a dependency relation.

While everyone is dependent at some points in their life, people with disabilities as severe as Sesha's are utterly dependent for their entire lives. Caring for Sesha has thus given Kittay a view of dependency writ large and has led her to deeply appreciate the complexities of caring. Kittay's analysis of the dependency relationship, and her development of care ethics in Part III of the book, builds on the insights of Part I by putting the subjective experience of what matters—which Kittay terms a person's "CARES"—at the center of care ethics. Recognizing the fact of human dependency focuses us on the importance of care, for "when we cannot attend to our CARES on our own, we are dependent on others" (152). In Kittay's account of what care is (which is a normative, and not just descriptive, account, namely, it presents what care ought to be), to care for someone is to promote their flourishing, while at the same time being attentive to the flourishing of other parties, such

as the carer, as well as those outside of the relationship. Care is to be given to those who cannot flourish without it. Importantly, the flourishing to be promoted is "flourishing as endorsed (*implicitly or explicitly*) by the one cared for," and the carer promotes such flourishing by attending to the "genuine needs" and "legitimate wants" of the cared-for, where genuine needs must have "both an objective and a subjective basis" and legitimate wants are limited to those that can be satisfied without harming others (139).

To care for someone, then, I cannot just do what *I* think is good for them; I must do what they themselves take to be good for them; put differently, I must care about their CARES. This is what makes it clear that the "completion of care"—namely, its reception as care—is necessary (though not sufficient) for something to count as care in the normative sense. If the purported "care" is not something that is at least eventually welcomed or "taken up" by the intended recipient, then it becomes evident that it was not something subjectively valued and did not contribute to their flourishing. For recipients of care that are not subjects, one just has to observe what seems to make them flourish—such as when one waters a plant and sees that this keeps it from wilting. But when the recipient of care is a subject, there must be some form of subjective endorsement of the care as care (where what counts as endorsement varies depending on what sort of agency the subject is capable of exercising). This means that care is not always possible—such as in the case of an intended recipient who refuses to accept any care. It also means that luck plays a large role in whether or not one can successfully care, because there are some unavoidable epistemic limitations to intuiting or predicting what will end up counting as care. When the recipient of care is a non-verbal subject, it can be hard to know what they do and do not endorse. Furthermore, "it may be questionable whether the endorsement is something that we ought to respect when it appears to go contrary to the person's best interests. A resistance to an action intended as care may be due to a failure to comprehend the nature of the care" (200). In clear-cut cases, one should act to promote well-being even if the recipient does not welcome the care (though they still might eventually appreciate it in retrospect); for instance, a child, or an adult with cognitive impairments, might not understand that taking medicine will actually promote their well-being long term. But what Kittay highlights is that many cases are not clear-cut and it is difficult for someone who intends to care to avoid mistakes: How seriously should one take the wishes of someone who is limited in what they can understand (either from immature or impaired cognition or judgment)? Should their wishes be overridden whenever they seem to conflict with some objective list of what is necessary for flourishing? The danger here is of paternalism that overreaches, or of substituting one's own subjective sense of what the good life is for that of the recipient.

What I find most illuminating about Kittay's newest contribution to care ethics is the way that it dissolves what I had previously understood to be a conflict between the value of autonomy and the value of care. According to my prior view, respecting someone's autonomy would frequently come into conflict with caring for them. I had

in mind, for instance, a non-disabled teenager who does not yet reliably act on sound judgments about what is good for them, due perhaps to their inexperience, or to impulsiveness, or to their susceptibility to the influence of others. Then, I thought, a parent must choose between either failing to respect the teenager's autonomy by not permitting them to make their own decisions, or failing to care adequately for them by not protecting them from their own bad decisions. But at least, I thought, by violating their autonomy a parent could adequately care for them. Of course, such scenarios are possible—the teenager might, years later, engage in the “completion of care” by coming to acknowledge how the parent's decision contributed to their flourishing. But Kittay alerted me to a third, and very likely, possibility: the parent's version of flourishing and the child's might genuinely differ, and not because the child's version is deficient in any way; the parent might act to promote the version of flourishing that they themselves endorse, instead of the version of flourishing that their teenage child endorses (now or ever). Thus, the parent might intend to care but instead *undermine* flourishing as endorsed by the one who is to be cared for. Not only has the parent failed to respect the child, they have also failed to care.

At the core of this insight is the dependence of value on valuing: what is valuable in life depends on what we care about, and we do not all have the same CARES. Perhaps the parent of a child who in some clearly manifest way falls “far from the tree”—to use Andrew Solomon's (2012) metaphor—is forced to recognize this when they confront their child's difference from the “normal,” though as Kittay points out the news of one's child's difference is not always welcome and may be experienced as “a profound shock . . . an upheaval of everything” (27). But for a parent as loving as Kittay clearly is, the shock wears off and the flourishing of the child—flourishing that is endorsed by the child in whatever way is possible for them, and that may be quite different from what flourishing is for the parent—is what comes to matter, thus making care, in Kittay's fully normative sense, possible. Parents whose children appear more similar to themselves may be slower to grasp this basic point because the child's similarity to them may support the parents' illusion that they can substitute what they themselves value for what their child values. But if they never grasp it, they will miss out both on the joy of the completion of care—its reception as care, which signals successful caring—and on the anguish of becoming aware of their own unwitting failures of care.

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## Overcoming Epistemic Injustice: Social and Psychological Perspectives

Edited by Benjamin R. Sherman and Stacey Goguen (New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).

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In a situation of oppression, epistemic relations are screwed up.

– José Medina<sup>1</sup>

Although editors Benjamin R. Sherman and Stacey Goguen do not frame *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* as a response to José Medina's characterization of the state of many epistemic communities, I read the book as offering a set of responses to the *screwed up* nature of epistemic relations. Some contributors to the edited volume detail the ways in which epistemic relations are even more screwed up—and difficult to remedy—than we might at first think.<sup>2</sup> Others develop analyses that offer finer-grained detail about the specific mechanisms by which epistemic relations are screwed up.<sup>3</sup> And others offer strategies for epistemic agents to begin repairing these screwed up epistemic relations.<sup>4</sup>

In their introduction to the book, Sherman and Goguen cite two concerns that, in their view, are discussed in epistemic injustice literature, but do not always come into focus as sharply as they should. First, they claim that discussions in epistemic injustice literature sometimes focus on uncovering and analyzing conceptual and metaphysical problems at the expense of focusing on what, in practice, we might do to ameliorate these problems (8). Although these conceptual and metaphysical problems are not left aside in the volume, Sherman and Goguen explain that “we were motivated by a more direct interest: we want to do better, and we solicited chapters that offer suggestions on how” (8). Second—and following from this desire to “do better”—each chapter in the volume deals, “at some level or another, with empirical research, to better understand what goes wrong, and how to improve (8).” “Empirical” is fairly broadly construed; Sherman and Goguen explain that “authors were invited to tie their ethical and epistemic arguments to empirical work and case studies” (11). Underlying both of these motivating concerns is the assumption that epistemic injustice *can be*, to some degree, overcome—an assumption that is reflected upon and problematized by various contributors throughout the book.

*Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* is organized into four parts, each of which explores problems of epistemic injustice in different contexts: in our own psychological tendencies, in healthcare systems, in legal and carceral institutions, and in education and sports. The contributors address a broad array of topics, including but not limited to whether individual epistemic agents can ever adequately assess and correct our own biases and prejudices;<sup>5</sup> the utility of Miranda Fricker's account of epistemic virtue for resisting

epistemic injustice;<sup>6</sup> the intersections between epistemic injustice literatures and conversations in psychology, phenomenology, critical race theory, and care ethics;<sup>7</sup> and the limitations of epistemic injustice for theorizing the extent to which our systems of knowledge rely on the existence and perpetuation of ignorance, unknowing, and forgetting.<sup>8</sup>

In my review, I follow the book's two central organizing principles in order to tease out elements of the volume that perform this "doing better" and to identify places where the volume might have gone further in its aims. The book's authors offer wide-ranging analyses and examples of epistemic injustice, with many different approaches to diagnosing and treating the problems they explore. In my view, *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* offers its most generative conceptual and practical resources when contributors problematize the volume's own explicit aims of overcoming, in favor of lingering with the unjust ways of knowing, forgetting, and learning that persist even—and perhaps especially—when we work to uncover them.

#### **"DOING BETTER" AS A FRAMING DEVICE**

After finishing the book—and particularly in light of the contributors' accounts of epistemic injustices in so many different contexts and cases—I wondered about the framing put forth in the introduction. *Can epistemic injustice be overcome? Many scholars of epistemic injustice, both within and beyond this volume, answer in the negative, while refusing to let us rest easy with this pessimism.<sup>9</sup> Who is overcoming epistemic injustice: privileged knowers who perpetuate epistemically unjust knowledge practices, or marginalized knowers who must navigate and resist these practices? How can or should conversations about these types of overcoming interact? Contributors take different approaches to who is overcoming—for some, the overcoming agent is the privileged knower who learns to recognize and ameliorate credibility deficits, help fill hermeneutical lacunae, and generally work toward epistemic justice within their own knowledge practices and those of their communities. For others, the overcoming agent is the victim of epistemic injustice, who develops strategies and tools for resisting the harms perpetuated by unjust knowledge practices. These different approaches to the notion of "overcoming" are perhaps part of a broader—and productive—tension in epistemic injustice literature between the need to resist the kind of optimism that (re)produces unjust epistemic norms and practices, and the need to recognize opportunities for exposing and ameliorating these very norms and practices. And there is, of course, an important distinction to be made between overcoming an injustice and getting better at resisting it. Still, I worry that the book's move toward improvement and progress, both in its framing and in some of its content, risks recentring privileged subjectivities and offers a comforting narrative of progress at the expense of exploring themes of epistemic resistance in more detail, or analyzing structures that actively work to preserve epistemic injustice.*

In her contribution to the volume, "The Episteme, Epistemic Injustice, and the Limits of White Sensibility," Lissa Skitolsky explores precisely this worry. In her view, contrary to the claims made by many scholars of epistemic injustice, "we

do not need to perfect our own power of moral perception" (206) in order to resist epistemic injustice; in fact, unjust knowledge systems construct subjects as limited knowers who *cannot hope to fully-recognize* the ways in which our sensibilities are formed by them (206). It might be that testimonial injustice runs far deeper than much of the literature on epistemic injustice has acknowledged—power relations and social oppression are already operating at the level of our perception and social imagination (211). Thus, for Skitolsky, self-reflection and self-correction are far more fraught tools for correcting epistemic injustice than we tend to assume. She contends that "the problem of epistemic injustice is not essentially related to a lack of knowledge but rather to an affective disposition that is reinforced by our perception of what is 'real'" (212). Rather than focusing on our own progress toward testimonial justice, people with structural privilege should work to get better at sensing their/our own epistemic, interpretive, and perceptual limits (212). To adopt Skitolsky's framing, my concern is that questions about the impossibility of overcoming epistemic injustice—and the injustices that we risk by assuming that we can—are underexplored in this volume.

There are, however, some notable exceptions. Indeed, one difficulty of reviewing this volume is the impossibility of generalizing about its contents—this might also be one of the volume's strengths. In her afterward to the book, Miranda Fricker, whose work grounds a great many of the contributors' analyses, wonders about the overcoming of epistemic injustice. In her view, "an in-principle pessimism is in order as regards this broader ideal of epistemic justice, for only pessimism will keep us safely alert to the ordinary injustices that, I believe, are bound to reoccur and reinvent themselves in new contexts and new mutated guises" (304). Some contributors to *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* remind readers that even if we want to claim, perhaps *contra* Skitolsky and Fricker, that epistemic justice is possible within our current *episteme*, there may be some specific epistemological contexts that foreclose the possibility of overcoming. For instance, in their contribution to the volume, "Carceral Medicine and Prison Abolition: Trust and Truth-Telling in Correctional Healthcare," Andrea Pitts contends that carceral systems distort the capacity for trust between incarcerated individuals and their healthcare providers (226)—these "patterns of distrust found in correctional healthcare settings cannot be alleviated by merely addressing the interpersonal dynamics between patients and providers" (231). Instead, Pitts argues for a prison abolitionist model in order to address these patterns and to develop new strategies for broader resistance to carceral systems. While I do worry about the collection's emphasis on overcoming and getting better, I appreciate the moments in the text where overcoming and improving are rethought and reframed as opportunities for transformation and reimagination.

#### **A PLURALISTIC APPROACH TO THE EMPIRICAL**

In addition to providing strategies for ameliorating epistemic injustice, the contributions to *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* also offer empirical evidence to support the claims and arguments being made. The volume takes quite a broad approach to what it means to offer empirical

evidence. For instance, contributors to part one (“Managing Psychological Tendencies”) cite work from psychology. In “Gaslighting as Epistemic Violence,” on the other hand, Veronica Ivy [Rachel McKinnon] offers a detailed case study of a trans woman’s experience with competitive women’s cycling—by recounting the woman’s experience with mobbing and gaslighting, Ivy [McKinnon] is able to expand her earlier account of gaslighting in order to highlight its epistemically violent nature and its connection to PTSD (290). And Katrina Hutchison analyzes a study that she herself conducted about the epistemic dysfunctions that women surgeons experience when they interact with patients (183)—her analysis allows her to offer a broader conception of what “counts” as epistemic injustice beyond Fricker’s often-cited examples of credibility deficit.<sup>10</sup> This broad approach to the empirical even allows for exploration of concerns about the ways in which uses of empirical evidence might be quite good at helping uncover and address issues like implicit bias, but be less-equipped to identify and analyze what Lori Gallegos de Castillo calls the “elaborate conceptual apparatuses”<sup>11</sup> that dominant knowers often use to explain away these biases.

Perhaps because of the broad approach to what it means to offer empirical evidence, there are also a broad array of philosophical traditions and methodologies represented throughout the volume. Contributors engage literature from, among other traditions, poststructuralism, virtue epistemology, critical race theory, care ethics, empirical psychology, and feminist philosophy. While epistemic injustice literature is generally taken to have a more analytic orientation, *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* includes a few continentally leaning contributions, and some that fall outside this methodological binary. Some readers might feel frustrated that even the general unifying theme of “utilizing empirical methods” does not tie the book’s chapters together very neatly. Like the overarching theme of overcoming, the overarching empirical analyses are taken in many different directions. But I am inclined to feel excited by this methodological pluralism—questions or concerns I had with some approaches were addressed in later essays, which opens space for the contributions—even the ones that are quite different in their aims and theoretical commitments—to be put in productive dialogue with one another.

This methodological pluralism also makes *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* a promising pedagogical tool. When teaching about epistemic injustice, we might use selections from this book to tie material to work in psychology, sociology, criminology, law, bioethics, etc. Even more importantly, the book’s focus on the empirical results in it also being filled with examples of what epistemic injustice looks like “on the ground.” I can imagine pairing contributions in *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice* with some of the foundational essays in the field. For example, in her essay, “When Testimony Isn’t Enough: Implicit Bias Research as Epistemic Exclusion,” Lacey J. Davidson discusses the prevalence of implicit bias literature in white social epistemologists’ accounts of racism. Davidson uses Kristie Dotson’s work on epistemic exclusion and Jeanine Weeks Schroer’s work on the public uptake of stereotype threat discourse to characterize the epistemic injustices

that emerge when philosophers are drawn to this data at the expense of engaging with literature that centers people of color’s experiences with racism. She cites work by Patricia Hill Collins, George Yancy, Nancy McHugh, Charles Mills, and María Lugones as offering these conceptual resources—some long before implicit bias literature emerged. Davidson worries that the privileging of implicit bias research over accounts like those offered by the theorists above functions as a way to avoid engaging with testimony that people of color have long been offering about the experience and operation of racism, in favor of using a particular kind of scientific evidence to think about white people’s racial biases (274). Reading Dotson and Davidson’s work together provides an example of an application of Dotson’s account of epistemic exclusion; furthermore, it illustrates a commitment to addressing epistemic injustices within the field of epistemic injustice research itself.

The methodological pluralism of the volume could have been even further enhanced by what might be called citational pluralism. Although contributors work from a variety of different philosophical traditions, many essays take Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice* as their theoretical starting point. Although Fricker’s work has been highly influential in thinking about epistemic injustice and oppression and many authors frame their analyses using additional resources that complement and complicate Fricker’s account, Fricker’s dominance in the volume is striking. Sherman and Goguen point out in their introduction that there is a long history of work on questions about the social, ethical, and political stakes of epistemology, and that this can be found in a variety of philosophical traditions (1). While Fricker’s importance in framing contemporary discussions of epistemic injustice should not be overlooked, the reliance on her work already sets contributors along particular paths, at the expense of engaging additional (and in some cases, marginalized) resources.

This repeated citation of Fricker is not the result or fault of any individual author; instead, it is a reflection of the broader epistemic injustice literature. Veronica Ivy [Rachel McKinnon] reminds us of what is at stake when we repeat what Sara Ahmed calls “citational paths”<sup>12</sup> that begin with Fricker (and no earlier):

while Fricker is widely acknowledged as the first to name and circumscribe epistemic injustice in these terms—and there’s been remarkably wide uptake of her view—there’s a long history in black feminist thought, and other feminists of color, that should be seen as also working on issues of epistemic injustice.<sup>13</sup>

My comments here are not intended to be critical of Fricker’s work specifically, nor are they an indictment of this volume’s editors or contributors; rather, they are an invitation for those of us writing on questions of epistemic injustice to engage with the broader (and earlier) literatures on the topic. I have in mind, for example, Mariana Ortega’s 2006 essay “Being Lovingly, Knowingly, Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color.” Ortega worries about the

active ignorance of white feminists, despite women of color—like Audre Lorde and María Lugones—pointing out the whiteness of many feminists’ conceptual frameworks, questions, knowledge claims, and methodologies. I also have in mind Kristie Dotson’s “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression”—here Dotson cites women of color who discussed “the problem of biased hermeneutical resources”<sup>14</sup> long before the terms “epistemic injustice” or “hermeneutical injustice” were coined, including Patricia Hill Collins, Gayatri Spivak, and Patricia Williams (44).<sup>15</sup>

## QUESTIONS OPENED BY OVERCOMING EPISTEMIC OPPRESSION

Where in our lives and communities do we find epistemic and hermeneutic injustices? How do testimonial and hermeneutic injustices operate in our healthcare, educational, and carceral systems? How can individual knowers work against our own biases in order to work toward testimonial justice? How do epistemically unjust systems interact with the epistemically unjust behaviors or attitudes of individuals? What does (or should) it mean to “overcome” epistemic injustice? Why might the very assumption that privileged knowers can perform this overcoming be, itself, fertile ground for epistemic injustice to reassert itself?

These are only a few of the questions posed and explored by the contributors to *Overcoming Epistemic Injustice*. While the book’s orientation toward overcoming is one that, in my view, ought to be problematized (and indeed, it is problematized at several important points by several different authors within the volume itself), its uses of case studies and examples make it a generative resource for those seeking on-the-ground accounts of identifying and beginning to address, as Medina puts it, screwed up epistemic relations. These questions are far from settled by the book, and this opens space for further philosophical investigation of the ways in which epistemic oppression, violence, and injustice structure our lives—and how these injustices might be rendered otherwise.

### NOTES

1. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, 27.
2. See Pitts’s “Carceral Medicine and Prison Abolition,” Skitolsky’s “The Episteme, Epistemic Injustice, and the Limits of White Sensibility,” and Davidson’s “When Testimony Isn’t Enough.”
3. See Freeman and Stewart’s “Epistemic Microaggressions and Epistemic Injustices in Clinical Medicine,” Kidd and Carel’s “Pathocentric Epistemic Injustice and Conceptions of Health,” and Ivy [McKinnon]’s “Gaslighting as Epistemic Violence.”
4. See Sullivan and Alfano’s “Negative Epistemic Exemplars,” Goguen’s “Positive Stereotypes,” and McWilliams’s “Can Epistemic Virtues Help Combat Epistemologies of Ignorance?”
5. See McWilliams’s contribution, “Can Epistemic Virtues Help Combat Epistemologies of Ignorance?”
6. See Madva’s contribution, “The Inevitability of Aiming for Virtue.”
7. See Vasilyeva and Ayala-López’s “Structural Thinking and Epistemic Injustice,” McDonald’s “Returning to the ‘There Is,’” Skitolsky’s “The Episteme, Epistemic Injustice, and the Limits of White Sensibility,” and Johnson’s “Teaching as Epistemic Care,” respectively.
8. See Skitolsky’s contribution.

9. See, for example, Medina’s *The Epistemology of Resistance*, or Kristie Dotson’s “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression.”
10. There are many additional approaches to the empirical that I am unable to summarize in detail here. I have cited a few here that, in my view, illustrate the wide range of approaches taken by the volume’s contributors.
11. De Castillo, “Unconscious Racial Prejudice as Psychological Resistance: A Limitation of the Implicit Bias Model,” 275.
12. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 15.
13. Ivy [McKinnon], “Epistemic Injustice,” 438.
14. Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale,” 29.
15. See also Ortega’s bibliography for “Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant,” as well as Veronica Ivy [Rachel McKinnon]’s endnote 7 in “Epistemic Injustice” for additional examples of women-of-color feminists exploring questions of epistemic injustice and ignorance.

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## Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family

Sophie Lewis (New York, NY: Verso, 2019). 224 pp. \$26.95. ISBN 9781786637291.

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Sophie Lewis in her book *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* doesn’t seek to enter the feminist debate on surrogacy, but rather to completely reset the terms of it. Over the past fifty years, the ethics of surrogacy have often focused on two aspects: the rights of couples who desire access to reproductive technologies to extend genetic lineage and construct family on the basis of shared biology, and the economic and bodily rights of the surrogates who make possible said reproduction for the intended parents. Often these rights are posed as being in an inherent tension, which considerations in ethics are meant to mitigate or solve as best they can. Lewis, by contrast, working from a queer, cyborg, feminist perspective and within a reproductive justice framework, rejects the possibility of an ethical surrogacy practice within a cissexist, heterosexist, capitalist, and anti-black racist global system. Yet, she argues not for its abolition, but for its radical expansion to build solidarity between paid and unpaid gestators. Practically, radical expansion, Lewis maintains, would better approximate access to reproductive

justice for surrogates through making concrete the practice of “surrogates running surrogacy,” which is rhetoric often deployed by fertility clinics without concrete realization. However, the desired end of surrogates working without bosses is not the limit of Lewis’s argument; rather, she sees this as a step in the ultimate project of dismantling capitalism and its alienating effects on the many forms of labor marginalized groups perform within this economic model. For Lewis, the abolishment of capitalism would eradicate the very meaning of the word “surrogate” as the boundaries between the original or intended parent and the surrogate or substitute parent are made fluid (145).

Importantly, while Lewis argues that the practice of surrogacy requires radical transformation, she is quick to reject the radical feminist approach steeped in savior politics. Surrogates, for one, do not empirically benefit economically, legally, mentally, or physically from the banning of the practice of surrogacy. Rather, the effects, unintended or not, tend to further obscure the work that surrogates do and compromises their lives as they are subjected separation from their families, forced travel across borders, inductions, and c-sections in order to fulfill a market demand amid restrictions on their economic opportunities. Centered here in Lewis’s concerns are the people who work as surrogates, but her argument quickly expands as surrogacy functions primarily as a metaphor for the way kinship under capitalism is structured by possession.

The strengths of Lewis’s text are many and include (1) her analysis and rhetorical disruption of the language surrounding surrogacy, which has failed to be seriously considered in other contemporary works on the ethics of surrogacy, (2) the novel application of a queer, cyborg feminist theory to the issue of surrogacy, and (3) the extent to which she enables thinking anew about heterosexist and patriarchal conceptions of the family freed from a capitalist and neo-liberalist logic. Regarding the first, Lewis takes as her target arguably the most famous surrogacy center in the world, Dr. Nayna Patel’s Akanksha Infertility Clinic in Anand, Gujarat, India. Patel’s work has been previously highlighted in both popular coverage and scholarly work. For example, she has been interviewed on the English BBC World program *HardTALK*, featured on a Vice News segment, and centered in the documentaries *Google Baby* (2009) and *House of Surrogates* (2013). In terms of scholarship, Lewis relies on the extensive ethnographic work of scholar Amrite Pande reading her interviews with the surrogates who live and work at Patel’s clinic with the language Patel uses to describe the work of surrogacy and herself as the lead clinician. Here, Lewis reveals the many contradictions and obscurities linguistically performed that have semiotic and concrete effects. For example, Dr. Patel frames herself as choosing the work of surrogacy in order to facilitate “women helping women,” but her clinic is for-profit. Thus, the work at Akanksha is not charitable, but is oriented toward the goal of creating profit for the owners of the clinic, of which Patel is one. Yet, by using this language repeatedly and having others endorse her through this rhetoric, Patel is able set her clinic up as different from other surrogacy clinics that are “womb-farms” (91). Furthermore, through framing in pseudo-

feminist language the surrogate process as “women helping women” she is able to “ritualistically unburden her customers’ doubts about the ethics of the exchange” (91). One does not have to be a Surrogate Exclusionary Radical Feminist to have doubts about surrogacy, as the racialized, classist, and nation-state of origin global politics can be quite obvious. Paying for surrogacy is expensive, thus one’s socio-economic class, which is further tied to racialized identity, one’s nation-state of origin, gender, and even religious and ethnic identity (for example, in India many of the surrogates hired by Hindu couples are Muslim). Yet, the language deployed here does even more work by obscuring surrogates’ labor as work by reframing it as “helping” and reinforcing genetic off-spring as a gift beyond quantification. That both of these notions are patently false is both beyond and undoubtedly the point. The surrogate is paid, though arguably not fairly, and there is a market for surrogacy and other forms of reproductive technologies, which shows the value of genetic offspring is monetarily quantified within a capitalist economic order.

The second notable strength of Lewis’s work is her use of queer theory and cyborg feminism to show that radical feminists’ efforts to thwart surrogacy is theoretically incoherent and practically disastrous. Queer theor(ies) are especially suited to support Lewis’s argument that surrogacy, like pregnancy and sex work, can be experienced in multiple ways. It is far from, as radical feminist groups like FINRRAGE claim, always experienced as oppressive and constituted by a loss, namely, loss of the child once delivered. Here, Lewis also extends a common critique of the white feminist framework of Margaret Atwood’s famous text *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), which serves the anti-surrogate pseudo-feminist message through rendering all surrogacy as enforced and indicative of oppressive gender politics. Yet, as is the case in most components of human life, there are multiple meanings possible at once constituting the same act or experience, thus universal and universalizing claims lead to misunderstanding and harmful effects. For many surrogates, pregnancy and childbirth are literal work for which they are paid, and the fetuses gestated are never imagined to be theirs to care for in the way that they care for the children in their families. Pande’s scholarly work complicates this notion a bit in that surrogates interviewed often imagine some kind of relationship with the child postpartum, though not a relationship akin to “parent” or “mother,” but a relationship that will not materialize, nonetheless. But this doesn’t necessarily hurt Lewis’s argument in that the notions of “mother” and “parent” themselves are not naturally determined relationships and contain within them contradictions and multiple meanings. For one, a child might have multiple mothers, or the role of “the mother” might be split between multiple people. Thus, on Lewis’s reading the surrogate exclusionary radical feminist (SERF) argument reinforces at least three problematic dictums.

First, it reinforces the idea that surrogacy is not “work” and thus erases the labor that constitutes gestating and birthing. Inevitably, this reinforces part of Dr. Patel’s marketing concept, namely, that surrogacy is a “different kind of work” and a “labor of love.” Second, SERFs re-naturalize parenthood as a cis-hetero project that entails cisgender

women gestating “their own” fetuses. Finally, the common SERF refrain reinforces a white savior politics, and SERFS themselves as white saviors, as it sets up brown and black surrogates of the global south as victims unable to act or make choices for themselves and their families. Lewis’s work, by contrast, provides space for a consideration of the voices of surrogates themselves, who do not understand themselves as oppressed or as victims in need of being saved.

For solutions to these problems, Lewis reads theorists like Donna Haraway (1991) and Maggie Nelson (2015) together and argues that we first must accept that authorship can only ever be co-authorship with others and even with technologies. One never makes themselves or undertakes a project solely on their own. Rather, it requires being made by and with others as we learn from others, co-operate with others, and recognize others. Understanding pregnancy and the care of children in this manner would, Lewis asserts, remake in revolutionary fashion our collective understanding of responsibility, family, parenthood, and even gender. Pregnancy here is understood as always being a form of alienation (128) whether chosen, accidental, or surrogate; but it is an alienation that is simultaneously an intimacy. One is alienated from one’s body as one becomes ever closer to the goings on of the body; one becomes closer to one’s projects as one is split from oneself quite literally in becoming multiple. It is, to put it succinctly, an inherently queer experience. But it is a queer experience that can be aided by and the pain lessened through technological advancement. This last point, that pain can be lessened through advancements in reproductive technologies and science, Lewis notes, is especially prescient as we consider the discrepancies in care to which white pregnant people and black pregnant people have access and the effects of such discrepancies that manifest well beyond the experience of pregnancy.

Finally, while Lewis provides further evidence that the family itself and the work that goes into producing “family” can be varied and multiple, she simultaneously argues for the destruction of the family. The family, for Lewis, is the space where capitalism, neo-liberalism, heterosexism, and patriarchy intersect necessarily to maintain the oppression and alienation of marginalized groups. Queer reformation strategies that focus on remaking the family through laws protecting queer unions, childbearing, and kin-making will not be enough in the end to transform the oppressive politics of capitalism as long as the family remains tied to notions of privacy and ownership. For Lewis, the only way to end exploitative surrogacy is to reimagine these ideas of privacy and ownership, which themselves can be abolished only concomitantly with the abolition of capitalism.

While I thoroughly enjoy Lewis’s work in *Full Surrogacy Now* and her arguments are sound, her considerations at times fall short in their practical application to the work of peripartum gestation and care. As revealing as it is to follow the author in her deconstructive analysis of the performative language surrounding surrogacy, as well her positive argument that frames all work as gestational, it doesn’t follow that there are multiple people who can do (some of) the work of literal gestation of a fetus and

postpartum breastfeeding. Pointedly, the collapse of the “can be” or “ought” and the “is” here is somewhat troubling. To be fair, and with full disclosure in mind, perhaps part of my hesitancy to accept that the work of gestating fetuses can be, and thus is, like any other work is due to the fact that I have recently participated in the gestational work of pregnancy and am still engaged in the work of breastfeeding. It doesn’t feel like work that could be done by another, and while support makes each of these forms of work easier, there is a materiality to the embodied experience of peripartum work that is arguably missing here.

Nevertheless, Lewis has a way out. Through the construction of her argument, she can hypothetically respond to any practical or material concern by stating that the objector simply is unable to imagine the world—and thus surrogacy as practice—freed from the constraints of capitalism, neo-liberalism, and heteropatriarchy. For example, Lewis may counter that my concern mentioned here simply reveals me to be like her father attached to the notion of shared genes as the source of family. I, she may note, am unable to conceive of the family, parenthood, care work, and so forth outside of the oppressive ideological and structural constraints that temporarily bind and obscure the possibilities of imagination. And to be reflective, perhaps this is true, in the same way that it may be impossible to conceive the being of womanhood outside of patriarchy, or what blackness is outside of the constraints of white supremacy. The fact that projects exist with the intention of imagining womanhood outside of the male gaze, and blackness outside of the white gaze, suggests that surrogacy, parenthood, and gestation in general can be reimagined and remade as well.

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## *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*

Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger (California: University of California Press, 2017). 360 pages. ISBN 978-0520288201.

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*Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, by Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger, provides a comprehensive and compelling argument for using a reproductive justice framework to address issues that incorporate reproductive policies but extend beyond the “pro-choice/pro-life” dichotomy that is typical in American cultural discourse. Beginning in the 1990s, women of color and low-income women began to push back on the use of the word “choice” within white feminist discourse, demonstrating the serious limitations to the “choice” framework for many marginalized communities.

Also, the “choice” framework, as it has been used, focused nearly entirely on preventing motherhood and less on the full spectrum of reproductive health care services and the intersecting issues that surround reproduction. Combining their scholarly and activist backgrounds, Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger work to create a useful introduction to the topic for scholar and activist audiences alike, crafting a complex, comprehensive, and intricate theoretical framework with a practical application. Beginning in 1994, twelve women of color formed an alliance called Black Women on Health Care Reform and began vocalizing the myriad ways in which white feminism dominated discussions in the pro-choice movement and in 2003, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective held a national conference where they sought to define reproductive justice. *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* builds off of the work set out in the first book about reproductive justice, *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice* (2004), written by Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena Gutiérrez.

Ross and Solinger define reproductive justice as having three primary principles: “(1) the right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child; and (3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments” (9, emphasis original). The term “reproductive justice” comes from combining reproductive rights and social justice, creating a coherent and wide-ranging term that encompasses a variety of social justice concerns that intersect with reproductive rights issues. With this definition, Ross and Solinger extend the very limiting discussion of pro-choice/pro-life political and social discourse well beyond the common conversation that focuses on individual or personal choices, and demonstrate the ways in which reproductive policies and decisions dictate how whole communities are impacted by these policies. Reproductive justice focuses on communities having the resources to not only have an abortion and access to contraception, but also for individuals to have jobs where they are paid a living wage, live in environments that are free of racism, and enact laws and policies that take into consideration how some populations face multiple types of oppression simultaneously.

Reproductive justice incorporates an intersectional perspective and focuses its theoretical lens on fundamental human rights that highlight and, at times, resist policies that are based on gender, racial, and class prejudices. Furthermore, a reproductive justice lens not only focuses on individual experiences of those who are the most marginalized, but on the ways in which state strategies and policies affect communities over time. This lens situates reproductive issues within both an individual context as well as within a larger social and historical context where they occur. Ross and Solinger’s examples illustrate how reproductive policies have affected whole communities, such as the racialized practice of sterilization and the impact the Hyde Amendment has had on lower-income women.

In the first chapter, Ross and Solinger detail the foundational theory of reproductive justice, showing the ways in which it utilizes and expands the human rights framework, and

demonstrate how fundamental human rights are not separate from reproductive health care. Building off of a broadly defined human rights framework, Ross and Solinger argue that the right to bodily self-determination is perhaps “the most foundational human right” (56). Reproductive justice differs from reproductive health and reproductive rights in that it calls for us to identify how reproductive oppression is the result of multiple, interlocking oppressions and is intertwined with the global human rights system as a legal framework. They argue that healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, is not a “commodity for purchase” (17) but is a human right that is foundational to bodily self-determination.

The second chapter describes the challenges and possibilities for building on current reproductive justice work and highlights some of the ways in which reproductive justice can help build an inclusive, unified human rights movement. Ross and Solinger claim that personal, firsthand storytelling within reproductive justice acts as a powerful tool, providing insight into an individual’s unique situation and that can help us to understand how others think as well as make decisions. They use the metaphor of “shifting lenses” (59) to describe the ways in which no single story can describe everyone’s experience and discuss the idea of “polyvocality” (59), or using many voices with different perspectives that come together to make a unified movement for human rights activism and theory. Historically, narratives have been used to give voice to those who are often silenced by racial or gendered oppression, such as women speaking out about rape in the 1970s that started a global movement to end violence against women. Reproductive justice advocates the use of narratives as a “key strategy for making social justice claims to change the world” (60) by building powerful coalitions through storytelling. There is also a useful discussion of the differences between reproductive rights, reproductive health, and reproductive justice, noting how reproductive justice calls for a holistic and integrated analysis that pushes against the structural conditions within which individual bodies, labor, sexuality, and reproduction are regulated (68–73). The reproductive justice framework centers on the power dynamics that are at play and seeks to work across social justice issues, demonstrating the capacity for reproductive justice to be thought of as *not only* focusing on reproductive concerns, but also on other issues that intersect with reproductive issues, creating a multi-racial, multi-issue, and polyvocal movement.

Ross and Solinger move into discussions of contraception and access to reproductive health in the third chapter, providing further distinctions between reproductive justice and other reproductive frameworks. They discuss how *Roe v. Wade*, often hailed as one of the largest wins for feminists, is couched in privacy claims and is considered a “negative right,” the right to be left alone by the government and for offices not to interfere in personal healthcare decisions. Reproductive justice seeks to reframe access to reproductive health services as a positive right, a right that includes not only choice in medical decision-making, but that also extends this positive right to reproductive services outward, to networks of support that provide all women with the ability to exercise their right to an abortion.

Ross and Solinger take on the legal aspects of abortion as well and note the ways in which legislation leaves out the social environments from which these discussions stem. For instance, legal aspects of abortion fail to recognize how economically burdensome obtaining an abortion in the United States can be for low-income individuals. Instead of insisting on the Court creating rights for humans, the authors contend that human rights are natural and inherited, simply based on the fact that we are all human. To demonstrate this claim, Ross and Solinger explain that reproductive human rights start with the “acknowledgement that a person has an inherent human right to control her own body and then seeks to use the political process to express this right and the judicial process to protect this right” (128). In other words, a reproductive human rights framework challenges the belief that rights begin with the judicial system and argues that social justice movements influence laws first. Instead of rooting the reproductive framework in the law, their position is that the most effective way to build reproductive autonomy is through the use of grassroots organizing, coalitions with other social justice-oriented organizations, and forming alliances across race and class lines. The Hyde Amendment, which prohibits public funding for abortion and was passed shortly after *Roe*, is one example they use to demonstrate the ways in which politics has more influence in health policy than actual health care and medical science. In addition, Ross and Solinger argue that accessibility is key to high standards of health care and that accessibility comes in the forms of physical accessibility, non-discriminatory services, economic accessibility, and the accessibility of information about those services. They demonstrate the ways in which these issues that are discussed within reproductive justice do not only focus on how it impacts the individual—although personal storytelling is one aspect—but on how these issues impact communities as a whole.

The fourth chapter focuses specifically on the right of individuals to parent, particularly the right to parent their children in safe and healthy environments. Ross and Solinger demonstrate the ways in which giving birth has become less of a private affair and that motherhood has become politicized in different ways, particularly for women of color. They emphasize the interdisciplinarity of reproductive justice theory and practice, specifically showing the ways in which different issues, such as education, play a role in reproductive justice. They look beyond the choices that individuals make and discuss the social determinants of health and how the lived conditions of individuals can impact their reproductive health, such as how “social and economic resources can create advantages and disadvantages for parenthood based on income, education, social class, race, gender, and gender identity” (173). In this chapter, the concept of “sexual citizenship” is discussed, which is a term used to describe the ways in which authorities and the government either grant or deny sexual rights to some groups and not to others. For instance, women of color and immigrants are often portrayed as being “hyperfertile” as well as “welfare queens” and therefore should not have “too many” children because it would put a strain on social services. While there are many goals of reproductive justice, one of those goals, discussed extensively in this chapter, is

the need to end reproductive coercion in medicine. They trace some of the historical and legal issues surrounding reproductive coercion and explain some of the ways in which women of color, disabled women, drug-dependent women, and other groups have been coerced into medical procedures they did not want or need. Ross and Solinger further explain that poor women are often seen as being poor decision-makers and, therefore, are denied dignity and shown to not be deserving of the same sexual and biological opportunities as others who are not poor. In this chapter, they focus heavily on five ways in which the reproductive justice framework intersects with other social issues, discussing immigration, incarceration, housing and gentrification, education, and environmental issues as all being related to reproductive justice. The authors do an excellent job explaining the ways in which reproductive justice is not a single issue; it extends out into countless other social issues and cannot be considered separate from other large, structural concerns in society.

The epilogue to this text is useful to activists who want to get a closer look into some of the ways in which reproductive justice can be implemented within grassroots organizations. Women of color are the pioneers of reproductive justice, and this chapter shows the ways in which six different organizations (New Voices for Reproductive Justice, Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights, SisterLove, Native Youth Sexual Health Network, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, and the International Center for Traditional Childbirth) have worked to incorporate reproductive justice into community organizing. Noting the similarities between these six different organizations, which are located all over the United States, Ross and Solinger show how each organization takes an intersectional approach and builds alliances with other organizations. They also highlight how all of the organizations share the belief of examining the conditions of the specific communities they serve and the history of that community in order to get the resources they need in that community, acknowledging that each region and demographic will have different needs.

This book is written for both activists and scholars. For activists, the book provides strategies and practices “to build a unified, radical, and inclusive movement” (58) with clear examples from successful organizations and practical uses for implementing a reproductive justice framework into community organizing. For scholars, this introduction is a useful resource in discovering ways to incorporate the reproductive justice framework into research and scholarship, appealing to both new and veteran scholars in a variety of fields, from public health to history. As a framework, reproductive justice is a tremendously expansive term that encompasses so many social justice issues to adequately cover in an introductory text; at times, it can become overwhelming for the reader. However, Ross and Solinger blend historical examples, legal rulings, personal stories, and a thorough explanation of the reproductive justice framework to alleviate that overwhelming feeling. They ask their audience to expand on the framework and incorporate it into research, community organizations, or other social justice movements. Reproductive justice, built by women of color and low-income women and centering

these marginalized voices, has become a new and useful way to envision radical and important changes to how we address the current issues we face as a society and how we can further human rights protections for all individuals as well as their communities.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### NEW APA BLOG! WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE AN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY (HBCU) FACULTY MEMBER

Keep an eye out for this new APA Blog!

The purpose of the APA Blog on What it's like to be an HBCU faculty member is to spotlight faculty members in our profession who work at historically black colleges and universities, which are minority serving institutions. The blog also aims to introduce and familiarize faculty members at majority-serving institutions with the distinct perspectives, experiences, and, sometimes, limitations, that are unique to students and faculty at historically black colleges and universities. If you have a recommendation for a faculty member at an HBCU, or other minority-serving institution, who deserves recognition, please feel free to nominate them!

<https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/02/03/what-its-like-to-be-an-hbcu-faculty-member-brandon-hogan/>

### FAB 2020

FAB 2020 is the 13th World Congress of the International Network on Feminist Approaches to Bioethics. **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, FAB 2020 will be moving to a virtual platform.**

Our World Congress brings together academics and practitioners from diverse backgrounds to explore and develop feminist perspectives on ethical issues relating to health. It is a vibrant and welcoming gathering that offers significant opportunities to share ideas, learn from others, participate in constructive debates and engage with a supportive network.

The FAB 2020 congress theme is "Feminist Perspectives on Solidarity and Autonomy." We anticipate a diverse array of stimulating presentations and discussions on this theme. There will also be opportunities to discuss feminist investigations in other areas of bioethics.

For more information, visit the FAB website at <https://www.fabnet.org/>.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Saray Ayala-López** works as an assistant professor of philosophy at California State University, Sacramento. Their current work applies conceptual tools from different areas of philosophy (philosophy of mind and language, and epistemology), together with empirical insights from cognitive psychology, to understand morally interesting questions. They are especially interested in explanations (structural explanations are their favorite) and the absence of them, sex and gender in science, conversational dynamics and the many things we can do with words, cognitive externalism, conceptual ethics, and several questions within social ontology and epistemology.

**Amy Allen** is liberal arts professor of philosophy and women's, gender, and sexuality studies and head of the philosophy department at Penn State. She is the author of four books, including, most recently, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2016) and *Critical Theory between Klein and Lacan: A Dialogue* (co-authored with Mari Ruti) (Bloomsbury, 2019). Her current research focuses on critical theory and psychoanalysis.

**Samantha Brennan** is dean of the College of Arts and professor of philosophy at the University of Guelph. She's a founder and past editor of *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*. She works in normative ethics and feminist philosophy, with a special interest in family justice and children's rights.

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**Jina Fast** is an assistant professor of philosophy at Notre Dame University of Maryland. She is currently at work on a book on Black Caribbean and American existentialism and phenomenology and has been published in the *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry and Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, & Social Justice*. As a feminist epistemologist and critical race theorist, her work centers on theories produced by and through the experiences and work of marginalized folks across disciplines.

**Kathryn Lafferty-Danner** is a PhD candidate in comparative humanities at the University of Louisville, where she also received her MA in bioethics and medical humanities. Her research takes an interdisciplinary approach to consider abortion in American culture and specifically, how medical humanities can be used to reduce abortion stigma. She is also an abortion access hotline volunteer with Kentucky Health Justice Network and teaches a range of English and humanities-based courses.

**Carol J. Gray** is a Crandall Cordero Fellow and PhD candidate at the University of Connecticut, where she studies political science, race and gender studies, and human rights. Her first career was as a public defender following a Prettyman Fellowship at Georgetown University Law Center working in their Criminal Justice Clinic. She was also a National Association for Public Interest Law Fellow at the Georgia Resource Center that represents prisoners on Georgia's death row in their postconviction appeals. Gray's dissertation is based on an oral history she conducted in Egypt of one of the country's leading human rights organizations. She was in Cairo (and in Tahrir Square) during Egypt's Arab Spring. Gray moved to Egypt with her family as a Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholar to study International Human Rights Law at American University in Cairo. From 2013 to 2014, Gray was a Fulbright Scholar at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

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**Eli Kukla** is an undergraduate at McGill University studying linguistics, gender studies and social justice, and urban geography. Currently working for his bachelor's degree, he also has an associate degree from George Washington University. He is co-authoring a paper, "Moving Through Real and Virtual Spaces," about the epistemology of space and movement and presented a version of this paper at the 2018 Philosophy of the City conference at Universidad de la Salle in Bogotá.

**Matthew Lindauer** is assistant professor of philosophy at Brooklyn College. He specializes in moral and political philosophy, moral psychology, and experimental philosophy, and has published work in *Philosophical Studies*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, and *Oxford Studies in Experimental Philosophy*, among other venues.

**Claire A. Lockard** is a PhD candidate at Loyola University Chicago. She is writing a dissertation about the call for interpretive charity in academic philosophy. She uses feminist philosophy, critical phenomenology, and epistemic injustice literature to explore some of the harmful disciplinary structures that are often reinforced when philosophers call on one another to perform charitable interpretations of problematic texts. She has also published essays on white confessions of racism (2016) and on diversifying the discipline (2017), both of which can be found in *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*.

**Joseph A. Stramondo** is an assistant professor of philosophy and associate director of the Institute for Ethics and Public Affairs at San Diego State University. His writing focuses on the intersection of bioethics and philosophy of disability and can be found in journals like *The Hastings Center Report*, *The Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, *The International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*, *Science and Engineering Ethics*, and *Social Philosophy Today*.

**Lisa Tessman** is a professor of philosophy at Binghamton University in New York. She has published in ethics, feminist philosophy, and related areas. Her work focuses on understanding how morality is constructed and how real human beings experience morality, especially under difficult conditions. Her most recent book, *When Doing the Right Thing Is Impossible*, discusses situations in which no matter what you do, you'll commit some moral wrongdoing. She currently is studying how unavoidable moral failures gives rise to what is called "moral distress" among healthcare practitioners, and the phenomenon known as "moral injury" in a military context. Her previous books include *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality* (2015) and *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (2005).

**Leigh Viner** earned her PhD in philosophy at Duquesne University writing on the Ancient Greek Stoics. She is an assistant professor of philosophy and coordinator of gender studies at Indiana University Southeast, teaching a wide variety of courses, including aesthetics, Asian philosophy, philosophy of gender and sexuality, and, recently, a seminar on Michel Foucault. She is also a musician in the experimental music scene in her hometown, Louisville, Kentucky.