

Advanced Topics in Science, Technology and Society
Topic: “What Sorts of People Should There Be?”

Class time and room: M 2 – 4.50 pm, Humanities Centre 2-7
Instructor: Rob Wilson
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Please read the whole of this course outline. Copies are also posted on my website.

1. Introduction and Overview

There has always been a social edge to biological research—from the development of vaccines to the contemporary anxieties linked with the Human Genome Project and its successors (e.g., in understanding biodiversity and proteomics). The successes and excesses of the social uses of biological knowledge in the past are not only worth studying for their own sake, but also provide a broader perspective on ongoing efforts to employ biological knowledge for social purposes, and, conversely, on the ways in which social goals guide and inform biological and medical research. This course will focus on past, present, and future uses of science and technology to achieve individual and social goals, with a special focus on *bioknowledge* and its implications for both individual / clinical choices and social / population-level policies and practices.

What Sorts of People Should There Be? will be a broad, interdisciplinary course focused on human enhancement, normalcy, and variation. It will weave together distinct philosophical, historical, and comparative threads to work on this topic at the interface of the humanities, biotechnology, and the social and health sciences. It will range from exploring the relatively unexamined history of eugenics in Canada (especially Western Canada), to understanding ideas about and policies concerning bioenhancement and normalcy in distinct ethnic and national contexts, to engaging in more speculative, future-oriented reflection on emerging biotechnology and bioknowledge and its entwinement with social planning and individual decisions. The course will be taught as a seminar, with active student participation expected and writing-based assessment.

2. Required Texts:

Daniel Kevles, *In The Name of Eugenics*.
Carl Elliott, *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream*.

3. Pre-requisites

STS 400 is the capstone required course for STS majors, and has as pre-requisites the remaining required credit courses for the major, or the consent of the instructor. Since these requirements will be relaxed effective 2007-08, the instructor will grant admission in Winter 2007 to students who meet the new requirements: STS 200 and any *two* of ANTH 230, HIST 294, PHIL 265, and C LIT 342. Students without these pre-requisites, especially those in Philosophy, History, Sociology, Anthropology, the biological and health sciences, and Education are also welcome, and may be admitted with the consent of the instructor. Inquiries to the instructor welcome, rwilson.robert@gmail.com .

4. Course Requirements

Assessment will be determined as follows:

- Book report due in class January 29th (20%)
- Short essay due in class February 26th (20%)
- Term paper due last day of classes (40%)
- Overall class participation (20%)

5. Film and Online Sources

There are a number of these that we might draw on, but two that we will definitely use are:

Film *The Sterilization of Leilani Muir*. National Film Board, 1997.

Online resources: <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/> and the following Wikipedia articles written largely by University of Alberta students: Alberta Eugenics Board, Compulsory Sterilization [Alberta], Sexual Sterilization Act, John MacEachran, Leilani Muir, Emily Murphy, Robert Charles Wallace.

6. Briefly Annotated List of Additional Readings

This is drawn from a much longer list of possible additional readings, and I'm more than happy to adjust in light of students interests and suggestions. For example, if people are especially interested in posthumanism (or transhumanism), in uses of genetic technologies, or in the politics of 'Big Science' biology, then we can add readings appropriate for these topics, and take out some others. Given that we're already reading two books in full or in large part, I'd like to keep these additional readings to about one per week or the course, even if we cluster them at particular times.

- Agar, Nicholas, 2004, "Genius Sperm, Eugenics and Enhancement Technologies", ch.1 of his *Liberal Eugenics: In Defence of Human Enhancement*. Blackwell, pp.1-19. Introduces the very idea of defending eugenics on liberal grounds.
- Asch, Adrienne, 2003, "Disability Equality and Prenatal Testing: Contradictory or Compatible?", *Florida State University Law Review* 315: 318-346. Takes on the complacency of leading bioethicists about the compatibility of current prenatal screening and positive views of disability.
- Davis, Lennard, 1995, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, Verso. Theoretically savvy probe of conceptions of normalcy, eugenics, and disability that is focused largely on the 19th-century. Chapter 2, "Constructing Normalcy", pp.23-49.
- De Grazia, David, 2005, *Human Identity and Bioethics*, Cambridge University Press. A defense of an animalist view of identity used to inform debates about enhancement, gene therapy, and margins of life issues. Chapter 6 "Enhancement Technologies and Self-Creation", pp.202-243.
- Grekul, Jana, Harvey Krahn, & Dave Odynak, 2004, "Sterilizing the 'Feeble-minded': Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929-1972", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17: 358-384. A discussion of the history of eugenic sterilization in Alberta.
- Kent, Deborah, 2000, "Somewhere a Mockingbird" ", in Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (editors), *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights*, Georgetown University Press, pp.57-63. A powerful biographical report as a blind mother giving birth to a seeing child.
- Lindemann, Hilde, 2006, "The Power of Parents and the Agency of Children", in Erik Parens (editor), *Surgically Shaping Children: Technology, Ethics, and the Pursuit of Normality* Baltimore: MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Draws on the notion of master narratives governing our own narrative constructions, including that of the scientific fix, the self-absorbed consumer, and the ugly outcast in our reflections on normalcy and difference.
- McMahan, Jeff, 2005, "Preventing the Existence of People with Disabilities", in Wasserman, Bickenbach, and Wachbroit, *Quality of Life and Human Difference*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Argues that while there are moral and prudential reasons to prevent the existence of a disabled person, this is compatible with positive views of having disabled children.
- Silvers, Anita, 1998, "A Fatal Attraction to Normalizing", in Erik Parens (editor), *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp.95-121. Takes on an assumption behind Norman Daniels' way of distinguishing treatment from enhancement that constitutes a bias against the disabled: that medical treatment should aim to restore normal functioning.
- Steinbock, Bonnie, 2000, "Disability, Prenatal Testing, and Selective Abortion", in Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (editors), *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights*, Georgetown University Press, pp.108-123. An explicit reply to Asch's claims about the

incompatibility of neutrality about impairment and selective abortion of putatively impaired fetuses that rejects the neutrality of impairment.

Trent, James, 1994, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States*, University of California Press. Especially informative on Goddard and the rise of the categories of moron, imbecile, etc., and on sterilization practices. Chapter 5, “The Menace of the Feeble-minded”, pp.131-183.

Douglas Wahlsten, 1997, “Leilani Muir versus the Philosopher King: Eugenics on Trial in Alberta”, *Genetica* 99: 185-198. Reflection on both the Leilani Muir trial and on John MacEachran’s ideas about eugenics and their origins.

Wendell, Susan, 1996, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Reflections on Disability*. A powerful, largely descriptive philosophical analysis of bodies that don’t conform to our expectations of normalcy and supernormalcy that is informed by Wendell’s own struggles with chronic fatigue syndrome. Chapter 4, “Disability and Difference”, pp.57-84.

7. About the Instructor

I came to Alberta in July 2000 as a professor of philosophy after teaching previously at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (where I was a member of the Cognitive Science Group at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology), and at Queen’s University. I did my BA in philosophy at the University of Western Australia, and my MA and PhD in philosophy at Cornell University (minoring in Cognitive Studies). I have also had *real* jobs: four years working in bars and liquor stores while I was an undergraduate, a year as a computer programmer, and a few years teaching Philosophy for Children in elementary schools in Perth, Western Australia.

My chief research and teaching expertise is in the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and the philosophy of biology. Recently, I have also worked on constitution views in metaphysics, on John Searle’s views of social reality, and on collective memory and group minds, and have taught courses on Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, and on contemporary uses of biotechnology and their relationship to views of disability and normalcy. In general, I am most interested in connections between philosophy and the various sciences, and I often getting my feet muddy in the process of pursuing those connections. I am the author or editor of six books, the two most recent of which are *Boundaries of the Mind* (Cambridge, 2004) and *Genes and the Agents of Life* (Cambridge, 2005). Most importantly, I am a long-standing member of the **Luxuriant Flowing Hair Club for Scientists** (<http://www.improb.com/projects/hair/hair-club-top.html>).

11/06