

Are There Morally Problematic Reasons for Having Children?

Claudia Mills

People have children for many different reasons. The Ayala family had a second daughter, Marissa, after reversing Mr. Ayala's sixteen-year-old vasectomy, because they were desperate for a bone-marrow donor for their first daughter, Anissa, who was dying of leukemia. Other couples, such as the Nash family, have sought preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) to select embryos during in-vitro fertilization (IVF) that would allow a tissue match for diseased older siblings. Christians believe that God created Jesus to save His other children. But what are we to think, ethically, about the deliberate creation by human parents of such "savior siblings"?

While we may certainly empathize with a parent's desperate desire to save the life of her endangered child, most of us also have some lingering moral discomfort at the prospect of consciously and deliberately setting out to create a child, with the use of all available technology, as a source of "spare parts" for another child. This emerges most frequently in the voices of "real people" on Internet exchanges:

"A child has a right to be welcomed for its own sake alone, not because it is a possible blood or bone-marrow match."

"It cannot be in the best interests of any donor child, however much they are subsequently loved, to be created for the primary purpose of providing transplant material for somebody else."

"This is the ultimate in utilitarianism: creating children because they are 'useful' and then destroying those other siblings deemed 'useless.' What a horror show."

"The child will grow up knowing they were only there because someone needed their stem cells . . . a part of them will always know the real reason they were born—as a commodity, a cure, a medicine almost."

"Babies should be brought into the world to be loved as individuals in their own right, not as a means of providing spare parts for others."

The recurrent or underlying claim here is that children are to be conceived and created not for any selfish or instrumental purpose on the part of the parents, however high-minded or urgent, but "for their own sakes." Those seeking to invoke philosophical author-

ity to ground this view appeal to the Kantian imperative that all persons are to be valued not as mere means, but as ends in themselves.

Before proceeding, I want to set aside two secondary, albeit related, worries: the alleged disrespect for life shown in discarding non-transplanted embryos in IVF cases, and the slippery slope toward the creation of "designer babies" for even more dubious purposes, such as athletic prowess or skin color. While both worries resonate with my central concern, each also raises other issues (the morality of abortion and of genetic engineering more generally) that would take us too far afield from my focus here: the degree to which a potential child is sought or valued only or chiefly for some particular instrumental purpose.

A small amount of reflection, however, leads to the acknowledgment that most children are created for some kind of selfish purpose on the part of parents; most are a means to at least some further end: "emotional satisfaction, to provide extra work force for the family, to have someone to transmit the family name . . . to guarantee support in old age, to obey God's commandments, to gain self-esteem or reputation for virility, and so forth," according to ethicist David

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Heyd. Philosopher Kenneth Alpern provides two competing lists of reasons for having children, one ostensibly "positive" and one ostensibly "negative." The former includes: a symbol of the union of the parents; an opportunity for giving unconditional love; participation in the processes of life and existence; and a source of personal renewal. The latter includes: a vehicle of status and conspicuous consumption; a source of consumable entertainment; mere emulation of others; and an illusory sense of immortality. In the Ayala case, in addition to providing bone marrow for Anissa, a second reason for creating Marissa would be to pro-

vide a “replacement” child if Anissa did indeed succumb to her illness. We should also note the extremely common case in which conception is not intended at all, but is the greatly regretted (but ultimately accepted) by-product of sexual activity undertaken for its own sake.

Faced with this plethora of possible reasons for having children, I want to examine two opposing responses. The first is to insist that the only truly legitimate reason for having a child is for the child’s own sake; while additional instrumental reasons may also motivate conception, they need not be unduly disturbing, if the child is conceived primarily for its own sake. I call this the “intrinsic motivation view.” The competing view holds that any and all motives for conception are acceptable, that we can completely separate the question of the reasons why parents have children from the question of how they treat those children, once born; the latter is morally important, whereas the former is not. I call this the “indiscriminate motivation view.”

I shall argue against both these extreme views. First, against the intrinsic motivation view, I argue that it is morally undesirable, if not conceptually incoherent, to create a child for the child’s own sake. But second, against the indiscriminate motivation view, I argue that this does not mean that the reasons for creating children require no moral scrutiny, or that all instrumental reasons for having children are on a moral par.

The Intrinsic Motivation View

According to the intrinsic motivation view, the only truly unproblematic reason for having a child is for the child’s own sake. Other reasons are all somewhat morally suspect. Now, it must be conceded that parental motives in conceiving a child are always likely to be mixed, as are all human motives. On the intrinsic motivation view, selfish parental motives in conception are deemed acceptable so long as the dominant motive is unselfish. Echoes of the intrinsic motivation view appear in many discussions of the Ayala case. Even writers who forcefully defend the Ayalas’ decision, and accept the legitimacy of a wide array of parental motivations for conception, tend to qualify their position by insisting on the need for at least the presence, if not the dominance, of the intrinsic-conception motive. Thus medical historian and ethicist Nancy Jecker writes that the Ayalas’ decision to conceive Marissa “fails to show respect toward her only if their sole reason for conceiving is to use Marissa, for example, as a means to save their other daughter’s life, or to keep the house from feeling empty if their other daughter dies.” Likewise, medical ethicists Pennings, Schots, and Liebaers write about preimplantation genetic selection: “The parents’ deci-

sion to conceive and select a certain embryo would fail to show respect for their future child if their only reason for creating a child was its tissue.” Or philosopher David Drebuschenko, in refuting a Kantian-inspired argument against Marissa’s conception, points out that such an argument “goes wrong in the contention that the only purpose in conceiving the child is to use its cells in an effort to save their daughter’s life. The public record makes plain that the family intends to love the child ‘for who she is.’” Now, Drebuschenko seems not to realize that both of these could be true: it might be that the only purpose in conceiving a child is to use its cells *and* that nonetheless

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the parents intend to love the child, once conceived, for who she is. But Drebuschenko apparently means that the instrumental purpose for conception is permissible (only) so long as the intrinsic purpose is also present.

Should children be created—only, primarily, chiefly—for their own sakes?

First, we need to try to figure out what the strength of the intrinsic motive is supposed to be here. Is the presence of the intrinsic motive a necessary condition for justified conception, so that conception cannot be justified unless the intrinsic motive is present, in addition to the presence of the instrumental motives? Or is it that the intrinsic motive must be a sufficient condition for justified conception, so that the parents would have chosen to conceive even without the instrumental motive? Some theorists insist on “the preceding wish” condition: parents should be free to use a child for instrumental purposes only if they planned to have a child anyway. This condition is certainly almost impossible to operationalize—what would count as adequate evidence of a separate and prior desire to conceive? In the Ayala case, while the parents had certainly evidenced a strong desire *not* to conceive additional children when Mr. Ayala underwent his earlier vasectomy, they did not conceive Marissa through genetically screened IVF and thus showed their willingness to welcome a second child whatever her genetic makeup; in the Nash case, the parents initially sought PGD because they did want a second child, anyway, and wanted to ensure that this child would not be born with the same disease as their first child—Lisa’s genetic ability to save Molly was an additional and subsequent boon to the procedure. The intrinsic motive seems stronger then, in the Nash case, though perhaps not enough stronger to make any significant moral difference.

Second, we need to examine the content of the required intrinsic motive more closely: what does it even mean to conceive a child for its own sake? The very idea seems deeply flawed. David Heyd, in *Genethics: Moral Issues in the Creation of People*, defends what he calls a “generocentric” thesis for evaluating “genesis choices”: “genesis choices should be guided exclusively by reference to the interests, welfare, ideals, rights and duties of those making the choice, the ‘generators’ the creators, or the procreators.” This is because, prior to conception, or generation, there is no actual person, no actual being, who can be affected by our choices; “the subjects of genesis choices are, by definition, persons who do not exist.” So it is, quite literally, impossible to act for the sake of nonexistent people. For this reason, “genesis choices are *always* ‘egocentric’ in some sense, that is, ‘use’ procreation as a means.” Nancy Jecker likewise suggests that “it might be argued that prior to Marissa’s conception, she did not stand in a personal relationship to her future parents; therefore, the decision to beget her does not

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depersonalize a personal relationship. After all, even if we may feel personally related to nonexistent persons (for example, dead family members), the parties in personal relationships must be particular and nonsubstitutable individuals. . . . Prospective parents cannot possibly be personally involved with still-to-be-conceived offspring, since there is no particular future person that could be the object of this involvement.” Heyd and Jecker seem to me to be right on this point: I cannot create you for your own sake, because prior to your creation there is no *you* on whose behalf I can act.

But I do not want to rest my case here on conceptual issues about the moral status and very existence of yet-to-be-conceived persons, but to develop a different line of argumentation toward a parallel conclusion. Even if we were talking not about the conception of a child, but about its post-conception and post-birth adoption, many of the same issues would arise about the legitimacy of various motivations for undertaking parenthood: what reasons for becoming a parent of this particular, already existing and fully actualized, child are morally permissible? Philosophical puzzles about the ontological status of not-yet-conceived persons will not help us figure out what we really care about here. One could imagine parents deciding to adopt an additional child as a savior sibling for their other (biological or adopted) children, first surveying the genetic profile

of available infants in order to find a suitable match for future tissue donation. And certainly parents have chosen to adopt children as replacements for a dead child, or for support in old age, or to gain the experience of unconditional love, and so forth. In such cases, we cannot argue that it makes no sense, or is somehow conceptually impossible, to enter into a relationship with you for your sake, as opposed to mine. Instead, I argue that this would be a most peculiar moral ideal for interpersonal relationships. In personal relationships we do and should desire to be valued at least in some sense instrumentally. Instrumental and selfish valuing can be as important morally as any allegedly intrinsic or selfless valuing. Or so I shall argue.

In arguing against Kantian deontological ethics, ethicist and political philosopher Michael Stocker creates the famous case of one friend visiting another in the hospital. In response to the ill friend’s gratitude for the visit, the friend persistently replies, “You don’t need to thank me; I’m just doing this because it’s my duty.” Stocker makes the convincing case that such a reply would hardly be reassuring. We do not want our friends to visit us in the hospital for the sake of duty, but for our own sake. Stocker maintains that “it is essential to the very concept of love that one care for

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the beloved . . . and act for that person’s sake as a final goal. . . . In short, to the extent that I act in various ways towards you with the final goal of getting pleasure—or, more generally good—for myself, I do not act for your sake.”

However, a variant on Stocker’s case can undermine his preferred answer—“I’m doing this for your own sake”—as well. Suppose a friend asks me to dinner several times, and at some point I ask him why he’s doing this. (Always a dangerous question!) I submit that the answer, “I’m doing this for your own sake,” would be hardly less troubling than “I’m doing this because it’s my duty.” What I want to hear is the answer, “I’m doing this because I want to, because I derive so much pleasure, joy, fulfillment, satisfaction, from your company.” It is the selfish, not the unselfish, answer that is most gratifying here. I want the friend to value me for his sake at least as much as I want him to value me for my sake. I had a high school friend whose mother told her, “I only married your father because I felt sorry for him.” Wouldn’t a selfish reason for marrying him have been more gratifying to the husband? And to his daughter, my friend?

This line of thought may be able to illuminate the child-creation case. Consider first the adoption case, as here we will not be distracted by the difficulty of making sense of what it would be to create a child for the child's own sake. In adoption one person adopts an already existing, already conceived and perhaps already born, person. What would it be to do this for the child's own sake? This seems quite easy to answer. When one hears of the plight of so many orphaned and abandoned children living in poverty and destitution around the world, it is a natural and morally commendable response to want to do something for these children, and in particular, to give them a home, a family, parents who will love them and care for them. A significant number of international adoptions have underlying humanitarian motives of this kind. I find myself unable to criticize these motives. Yet I submit that the adoption of a child is not in any way compromised, but actually enhanced, by the presence as well of non-humanitarian reasons for the adoption—selfish reasons on the part of the adopting parents. It seems a better scenario when the benefit from the adoption is mutual: not just that you needed me to do this for you, but that I needed you to do this for me. Not just that you needed a parent, but that I needed a child, wanted you not (only) for your sake, but for my own, to feed some hunger of my own heart.

Against the intrinsic motivation view, I therefore claim that intrinsic motivation for love—loving you for your own sake—is not morally preferable to instrumental motivation—loving you for my own sake.

One objection here points to the existence of cases where A loves B so much that A is willing to forgo any benefit whatsoever that B might provide to him: A gives his life for B (perhaps in a *Tale of Two Cities* scenario), or A (in the case of romantic love) leaves B free to pursue love with someone else, loving B so much that A wants only for B to be happy, even at the cost of severing the relationship between the two of them entirely. In the parenting case, we might think of situations in which a birth mother relinquishes parental rights in the belief that this is best for her beloved child. Isn't this the highest and purest form of love?

I confess to feeling the pull of these cases. Still, they seem odd as the model of a loving relationship, where I continue to maintain that our highest ideal includes mutuality, A loving B and B loving A. Our focus on conception has been to ask what reasons there would be for entering into such a loving relationship in the first place. Here I continue to think that there is something odd about initiating a relationship with you to benefit you. Even if this is an (arguably) high and pure form of love, or charity, it nonetheless does not seem to me to be an ideal model for a human relationship. I want to be in a relationship with someone who wants to be in a relationship with me—just as she wants to be

able to give to me, I want to be able to give to her. An adopted child who is told that his birth mother relinquished him as the supreme act of sacrificial love may ask, all the same, "But didn't she *want* me?" To be loved without being wanted is an incomplete form of love. So I reaffirm my claim that selfish motives for entering into and maintaining relationships, including our central case of the parent-child relationship, are not only morally unproblematic, but morally exemplary.

The Indiscriminate Motivation View

Are all selfish motives on a par? The competing view that I am examining, the indiscriminate motivation view, refuses to make any discriminations among reasons for conception, holding basically that all motives for conception are equally acceptable, that we can completely separate the issue of the reasons why parents have children from the issue of how they treat those children, once born. University of Texas School of Law professor John A. Robertson, a vehement defender of procreative liberty in all forms, argues that "procreative liberty should include the right to have children for any motive, including to serve as a marrow donor, if such goals or uses of the child independently respect that child's interests. If postbirth organ or tissue donation in infancy is independently acceptable, then it should also be if the child was deliberately conceived and brought to term for that purpose. That assessment should be made independently of the genesis of the child." In particular, regarding the Ayala case, Robertson argues that if it is permissible use a child for a certain purpose after birth, it is permissible to conceive a child for that purpose prior to birth. Even Robertson makes a quick nod to the intrinsic motivation view, however, by conceding that "wanting children for their own sake may be the ideal."

Pennings, Schots, and Liebaers propose what they call "the postnatal test" for assessing reasons for conception: "it is ethically acceptable to make a child for a certain reason if it is acceptable to use an existing child for the same reason." On their view, however, the postnatal test is merely a necessary and not a sufficient condition for a child's creation: "There are still the child's needs to be considered, e.g., the need to be loved for its own sake." In defending the postnatal test, they rely on the principle that if x is morally acceptable, the intention to do x is also morally acceptable.

This seems to me a considerable leap. To win the Nobel Peace Prize is morally acceptable; to intend to win the Nobel Peace Prize seems superficial and crass. And it does not at all seem to be true that it follows from the claim that your doing x is morally acceptable that entering into a relationship with you just in order to get you to do x is morally acceptable.

Thus, I want to argue against the indiscriminate motivation view as well as against the intrinsic motivation view. All selfish or instrumental motives for initiating and sustaining a relationship are not on a par. Returning to the earlier dinner date example: while I do not want someone to invite me to dinner purely for my sake, I also might resent a whole range of selfish or instrumental motivations my dinner partner might give for the invitation. Consider this list of possible answers to the question, "Why did you invite me to dinner?" 1) I'm cultivating your acquaintance so that you can be a useful business contact for me in the future; 2) I want to borrow something from you—money, a car, a vacation rental; 3) I want to get laid; 4) when I'm depressed, you cheer me up and make me laugh; 5) you're a great listener; 6) you give me good advice when I have a problem; 7) you're so much fun. All seven reasons appeal to the instrumental value of the relationship for one of the parties to it. In all of them, I am being treated in some sense as a means. Yet these reasons are not on a par. What makes the difference in our responses to the various kinds of instrumental reasons on the list?

We can try out several possible explanations here. One factor tainting some of these reasons is the degree to which the instrumental motivation is hidden or covert. This explanation appeals to the importance of

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consent in determining whether or not we are being used as a mere means in any encounter: would I consent to being used in this way? We resent becoming involved in a relationship where the other party has some hidden agenda, which is not made available to us for our endorsement. But this just returns us to the question of why one party might feel the need to hide his motivation, which is just a restatement of the question about which motivations are *prima facie* suspect. The question, "Would the parents be able to tell their child the reason why he or she was conceived/adopted?" collapses into the very question with which we began: which reasons, if any, are problematic, and so something the parents might not wish to disclose?

Another possibly problematic factor is the degree to which the instrumentality is mutual and reciprocal, versus one-sided.

It certainly seems fine to invite someone to have dinner to cultivate a possible business relationship, but much less so if this instrumentality is not shared by

both parties. It is also problematic if the same sort of instrumentality is not shared by both. Aristotle, in his famous discussion of friendship, notes cases of what he calls "incomplete" or largely instrumental friendships in which one person is pursuing a friendship based on utility, while the other is pursuing a friendship based on pleasure, commenting that "the friendships are more enduring whenever they get the same thing—pleasure, for instance—from each other." Parity in instrumental benefit is relevant to the case where one child is conceived and created as a potential tissue donor for another. If parents create a child so that the first sibling can have a friend, the benefit here is reciprocal: each sibling is benefiting the other in the same way. Likewise, if the parents are creating a child in order to have the experience of engaging in a loving and committed relationship with it, the child is also receiving the benefit of participating in that kind of relationship. In the tissue donation case, by contrast, the proposed benefit is one-sided: B is intended as a donor for A, but not vice versa.

A third possibly problematic factor is the degree to which the initial motivation for undertaking the relationship will compromise the subsequent relationship in some negative way: perhaps in some cases we cannot go on to have a full-fledged rewarding relationship with someone because of the instrumentality of its initiation. However, Jecker points out that "although ideally personal relationships are initiated and continued for their own sake [the intrinsic motivation view again], after a personal relationship has been established and sustained the motives for establishing it recede in importance." This seems to be true: how many love stories are there where two people encounter each other for morally suspect reasons—say, as Russian spies—and then genuinely fall in love? For the child creation case, the issue is whether a child created for the purpose of being a savior sibling may have difficult burdens placed upon her as she grows up. While some relevant donation is done during birth, making use of the umbilical cord and placenta, and is extremely unobtrusive, in other cases, expectations of sacrifice may be ongoing and painfully severe. Jodi Picoult's novel, *My Sister's Keeper*, spins a riveting fictional tale of an adolescent child driven to sue her parents for rights to her own body, after having been created as a savior sibling. So reasons for conception are problematic to the extent that they increase the chances that the child's subsequent life will be unhappy, that they work against the conditions for a full and flourishing life.

These three factors, even taken together, do not seem to be the whole of the story, however. None of these suggestions, in my view, captures the most central element in distinguishing cases of instrumental valuing that I welcome versus cases of instrumental valuing

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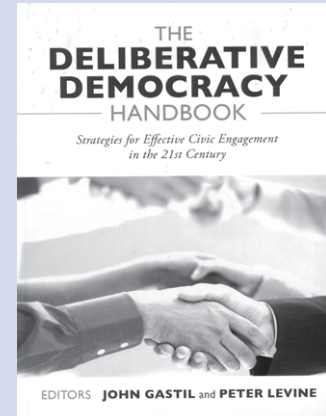
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that I resent. As I argued earlier, I want to be instrumentally valued in an intimate relationship, yes; but I want to be instrumentally valued for some trait or quality that I hold to be intrinsic to me, central to my identity: I want to be instrumentally valued for *who I am*. Thus we return to the formulation with which we began: I do want to be valued for my own sake, after all—where this does not mean that I want you to be unselfishly benefitting me, but that I want you to be selfishly benefitting from *me*, as a person, as who I most truly am.

When I was in high school, I had a friend (actually, this was the same friend whose mother married the father out of pity!) who valued her boyfriend chiefly because he had a car. Now, the boyfriend didn't know that he was valued chiefly for his car; the benefit

exchanged was not reciprocal, and the relationship never grew past the use of the boy as a source of transportation. But I think the deepest problem here was that the boy was valued for something that was so peripheral to his identity, so extrinsic to his self. Whether or not this is so—whether the valuing is extrinsic in this way—depends to a great deal on the boy's own sense of his identity. Some men may identify themselves closely enough with their cars that they would welcome someone's instrumental valuing of them for that reason. In the closing book in the Little House series, *These Happy Golden Years*, Laura Ingalls is attracted initially to Almanzo Wilder because she admires his fine Morgan horses. Shared enjoyment in Sunday buggy rides becomes a bond between Laura and Almanzo, as they work together

to gentle a particularly skittish and difficult horse. When Laura and Almanzo finally become engaged, Laura's mother tells her, "If only you are sure, Laura . . . Sometimes I think it is the horses you care for, more than their master." "I couldn't have one without the other," Laura answers. To value Almanzo's horses, Laura suggests, is to value Almanzo, for who he is. But generally, the valuing that we value will converge not on our possessions, or on our products, but on our characters, as Aristotle recognized: not necessarily on our "virtue," or excellence, as Aristotle insisted, but on the whole range of our traits and characteristics, the things that make each of us the person we are.

Thomas Donaldson distinguishes between what he calls "value-intrinsic" and "value-extrinsic" institutions, where an institution is "value-intrinsic" to the "extent to which an institution's ends are logically unobtainable without the existence of the institution

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itself" and an institution is "value-extrinsic" to "the extent to which an institution's ends conceivably could be achieved by other means." We can recast his point in the language of "value-intrinsic" versus "value-extrinsic" relationships. In "value-intrinsic" relationships, what is valued from the relationship is unobtainable without *us*, without our being who we are. If I value you because you have a car, well, I could get transportation in so many other ways. So many boys have cars; I could write their names on a piece of paper headed "Boys with Cars" and simply throw a dart at it to choose my date. So, revisiting our list of reasons for a dinner date: the value-intrinsic ones are the ones where the date couldn't meet that need, or achieve that desire, with anyone else but me. In *The Tragic Sense of Life*, Miguel de Unamuno writes that our passionate yearning for immortality is the yearning to be irreplaceable. In this way, being valued as a means converges on being valued as an end: being valued for who I am.

Now, there is a problem here for my argument regarding reasons for conception or adoption. Children initially cannot be valued in this way. Before conception, as Heyd and Jecker have argued, there is no child there to be valued, for whatever reason, intrinsic or extrinsic. I can't value you for who you are if you don't exist yet. And in the adoption case, I can't value you for who you are if I don't yet know you, or know anything important about you. It is very odd that parents love their children before they are even born, which they plainly do, with no knowledge of a

single fact about them except that in some sense they are *theirs*. Biological parents love their children in this way; adoptive parents, waiting for the arrival of a child they have never seen from half the world away, love their children in this way. It is a love based on nothing distinctive about the individual in question, nothing at all. So how can the love be value-intrinsic in the way I have just described?

Well, in the parent-child relationship, at its outset, we can capture part of the idea of being loved for who you are, even in the absence of any knowledge of your actual, particular identity, by your being loved as my child, as both provider and recipient of goods that cannot be obtained in any other way, save through the relationship itself. Reasons for conception and adoption will then be more problematic to the extent that they value the child, not for the goods intrinsic to the parent-child relationship, but for external goods that could be procured in countless other ways.

Looking again at the two competing lists of reasons to conceive children drawn up by Alpern: the reasons we want to reject either involve seeking "goods" that are not truly goods, goods that we should reject as unworthy goals in their own right, or seeking goods that might be acceptable goals to pursue but could be pursued in many other ways. Alpern's negative reasons for conceiving children—e.g., a vehicle of status and conspicuous consumption, a source of consumable entertainment, mere emulation of others, and an illusory sense of immortality—all appeal to goals both that we independently find unworthy, and that permit of many different avenues of pursuit. Whereas his positive reasons—e.g., a symbol of the union of the parents, an opportunity for giving unconditional love, participation in the processes of life and existence, and a source of personal renewal—are both worthy of independent moral endorsement and point to benefits arguably unique to the parent-child relationship.

Of course, figuring out what benefits from a relationship are intrinsic to the relationship, and which are extrinsic, cannot be purely a matter of logical analysis (as Donaldson's formulation seems to suggest). For relationships are not defined in a dictionary, but within a culture, a history, that shapes how we view, for example, the nature of a family, and what family members owe to one another, even as we may want to criticize and reject various cultural understandings of these bonds. Still, I think we can draw some distinction between benefits that are intrinsic to a relationship and those that are extrinsic, even if the line is bound to be a blurry and culturally shifting one. To value a friend because he offers his own distinctive advice to my problems and makes me laugh by sharing inside jokes known only to the two of us is importantly different from valuing the same friend because he gives me rides and buys me drinks.

So what about creating a child as a bone marrow donor for a sick sibling? The potential sibling is being valued for something that the parents and existing sibling find all but impossible to get in any other way, so in that sense the value sought is not generic or interchangeable. But the potential sibling is being valued for something that she is likely to view as tangential to who she is as a person. Very few of us consider our bone marrow to be an essential or intrinsic element of our identity! So this use seems to veer toward a morally problematic instrumentality. At least, I think this formulation of the situation helps to characterize the source of the uneasiness many of us feel about it, and why this is different from creating a second sibling as a companion for the first, or as a "replacement sibling" should the first sibling die. Bone marrow is at least theoretically, if not practically, obtainable from other sources; being someone's brother or sister, someone's son or daughter, is not.

However, as we have noted earlier, the reasons for conception and adoption are almost always varied and complex. One could characterize the decision to conceive any subsequent child as the decision to create a person who will stand to the existing child in the unique relationship of siblings, in all that this relationship entails, including squabbling over who sits in the front seat, sharing stories about how awful your parents are, deciding together on whether to put them in a nursing home, spending holidays together —and giving bone marrow to the other one, if it is needed. Whether we think the conception of a savior sibling is problematic, in the end, will depend on the degree to which that donation is embedded in a relationship in which each party is an instrumental resource to the other in the best and deepest sense, based on who each person most truly is.

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