

Introduction

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From the birth of Louise Brown (1978) to today, biotechnology and the expansion of individual freedom and rights have brought about profound changes in the human reproduction scenario, altering the boundary between chance and choice, and questioning the moral relevance of the natural/artificial conceptual pair. The increasing research into “Assisted Reproductive Technology” (ART) is transforming the very way of conceiving reproduction both in medical and philosophical terms: ART refers to all sorts of technique/technologies that are employed to facilitate and assist the conception of a child without sexual intercourse being involved. It includes technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI). Other techniques and practices, such as surrogacy, ectogenesis and artificial wombs, may also imply ART. The introduction of these technologies has fostered a redefinition of the meaning and construction of personal and social relationships and reproductive choices. On a philosophical level, rethinking of concepts such as ‘family’, ‘parenthood’, ‘motherhood’, ‘person’ and reflecting on the rights, duties and responsibilities of the possible, potential, and actual individuals involved is all the more necessary: whereas “the nuclear family is still often considered as an entity defined only by biological ties”, ART has complicated this conception “by providing treatments to single people and gay and lesbian couples, as well as to heterosexual couples to whom the conventional definition of infertility applies”¹.

As the topic of artificial reproduction increasingly intersects different discourses in an interdisciplinary way – from legal concerns to the ethical level, from medical and psychological issues to the social and political sphere –, research on

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¹ B. Hinding, *The State of Artificial Reproductive Technology Today*, April 13, 2023 (online at: <https://www.offitkurman.com/offit-kurman-blogs/the-state-of-artificial-reproductive-technology-today>).

new forms of technological reproduction and surrogate parenting has reignited the feminist debate (which has always reflected on the question of motherhood and its (bio)politics) by reactivating the polarized alternative between the right to self-determination and the risk of exploitation or oppression: rather than this polarity itself, the present issue of *Humana.Mente* aims at exploring and evaluating the problems and views that lie between the extremes of this polarity and, more broadly, at offering an overview of the ontological, experiential, ethical, and legal aspects of this complex set of topics. Therefore, the contributions gathered in this volume explore complex issues related to artificial reproduction through a pluralistic variety of approaches, methodologies, and focuses.

The volume opens with Anna Smajdor's article: starting from the idea that the human species may be under threat of extinction, and following the arguments developed by the pessimistic Norwegian philosopher Peter Zapffe, Smajdor contends that consciousness by itself is insufficient to cause human extinction; however, when combined with human reproductive design, it poses a far more compelling threat to the continuation of human existence. "What would our reproductive future look like – asks Smajdor – if we ceased to bombard women with valorising messages about reproduction? If it looks worrying, what should we do about it?"

Ji-Young Lee's contribution explores the global trend of institutionalized pronatalism, which frames low fertility as a demographic crisis, often placing the responsibility for both the problem and its solution on women's bodies. In response to such concerns, assisted reproductive technologies (ART) might be adopted by pronatalist governments as a means of boosting fertility, rather than as a tool for supporting individual prospective parents. This opens the possibility for ART to be appropriated by states for demographic agendas that may not align with emancipatory objectives. However, the influence of pronatalism is often overlooked in feminist bioethics as a hindrance to the ethical use of ART. In this paper, I argue that assuming ART can be used for emancipatory purposes without critically examining its ties to institutionalized pronatalism is a mistake.

Maurizio Balistreri addresses the potential proposal to make future genetic modifications mandatory to prevent "irresponsible" reproductive choices. The response to the recent pandemic has demonstrated the inherent complexity of balancing values such as the collective good and individual freedom. Tensions and conflicts of this kind can arise in a society that imposes therapeutic or enhancing genetic interventions. The author argues that attempts to justify the violation of reproductive freedom in the name of community interests are unsuccessful.

Sergio Filippo Magni's essay is concerned with the non-identity problem. The paper focuses on the bioethical debate surrounding He Jiankui's 2018 experiment, which allegedly resulted in the birth of two twins whose genome had been modified using the CRISPR technique at the embryonic stage to enhance resistance to the HIV virus. Magni questions whether gene editing is an identity-affecting technique in these cases and, therefore, whether it raises the non-identity problem, formulated by Derek Parfit 30 years ago. Magni argues that He Jiankui's gene editing is not an identity-affecting procedure, which has important implications for the moral evaluation of these technologies.

In their co-authored article, Oliver Feeny, Sergei Shevchenko, and Vojin Rakić argue that advancements in procreative technologies bring about transformations on multiple levels, including ethical considerations and the foundational concepts underlying ethical arguments. One notable instance is the shift from the concept of selection to gene editing, which alters debates regarding the potential benefits or harms to future offspring. The authors critically examine the assumptions of "identity" and "disability" often invoked in debates between "person-affecting identity-preserving (gene editing)" and "non-person-affecting identity-changing (selection)" perspectives, and identify an emerging category: "person-affecting yet identity-changing," where the traits altered or corrected are integral to an individual's identity in significant ways. Furthermore, they highlight echoes of genetic determinism within these discussions and argue that incorporating an understanding of social and environmental identities reveals a far more nuanced complexity.

In her article, Silvia Zullo analyses key normative and critical issues surrounding the right to surrogacy in relation to self-ownership and property rights. Surrogacy remains a contentious practice, broadening opportunities for women as both workers and mothers. Moreover, debates around gender, self-ownership, and exploitation (which have been central concerns for feminists in the 1980s and 1990s) prove still highly relevant today. The first part of the contribution challenges the liberal property model, which treats individuals as property owners with the autonomy to control their bodies and body parts. This issue is framed within the current ethical and legal discourse, questioning whether people can truly be seen as owners of their bodies and parts. In the second part, Zullo argues that in a liberal democratic society, the right to surrogacy should be understood as a contractual right and a right to occupational freedom, rather than as a matter of self-ownership or property rights.

In his essay, Matteo Galletti focuses on a specific technology, the mitochondrial replacement therapy. In public discourse, children born through this technique are often described as having three parents, emphasizing the biological contribution of the egg donor from which the mitochondrial DNA comes. The two main arguments advanced to exclude mitochondrial DNA donors as full parents are based, respectively, on the notions of identity and causality. The author argues that neither argument is successful, but their analysis allows us to understand the relevance of the notion of ‘investment’ in the attribution of parenthood and the associated moral responsibility. Finally, the conventional nature of parenthood is emphasized and situated within the context of institutionalist social ontology.