

DAVIDE BATTISTI. PROCREATIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES, NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE 2025

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ABSTRACT:

Reproduction has been an exquisite process of nature in which new life comes into existence. Procreation is typically a biological process in which the procreators, i.e., mother and father play the most important role. But now, that act has taken on a new dimension with the advent of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs). ARTs have given humans rights and freedom through procreation, in which parents can control even those aspects of procreation which were once left to nature or fate. However, the advent of ARTs raised a crucial question- The Question of Responsibility: Is procreation freedom or a true responsibility? Is it a duty in which ignoring moral obligations and bioethics would be no less than an atrocity?

INTRODUCTION

Earlier this responsibility was limited to guardians only, but the involvement of technologies and science has enhanced the scope of this responsibility. Now not only guardians but also many medical professionals, donors, influential members of society, state and lawmakers have a stake in the procreation processes. Therefore, a great deal of work is now being done on the moral responsibilities linked to ARTs which Davide Battisti (2024) has made the main subject of his book “Procreative Responsibility and Assisted Reproductive Technologies”. Battisti's work focuses on the person-affecting perspective in which the impact of ARTs on procreative responsibility is explored. The author has mainly focused on Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), Genome Editing (rGE) and Ectogenesis technology.

This book consists of seven chapters that progress logically. Each chapter sets the stage for the next chapter and prepares the readers to understand the upcoming complex debates regarding responsibilities and morality.

The first chapter is the foundation of this book preparing readers for the ethical perspectives in the subsequent chapters. First the author highlights currently available techniques, which include In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), Prenatal testing, Mitochondrial Replacement Therapy (MRT), and Fetal therapy. Certain other technologies have also been highlighted, ones that may be available in the future, such as, In Vitro Gametogenesis (IVG), Genome Editing (rGE) and Ectogenesis (artificial uterus). Adopting a pragmatic optimism approach, the author devotes little time to discussing the safety, errors, accessibility, cost, or success of these technologies, instead focusing on the moral responsibilities and ethics related to them, taking it as a “moral insurance” (p. 29). These innovations give freedom and control while challenging the traditional notions of procreation and disrupting the symbolic value of the experience of pregnancy and conception. Thus, new ethical dilemmas are non-negligible

The main point of the second chapter rests on a basic principle: where there is control, there comes responsibility. The author clearly differentiates between procreative responsibilities (affecting the child) and reproductive responsibilities (affecting society) are interchangeable (p.50). Battisti believes that, in ancient times, the health of a child as well as its qualities were left to nature or fate, hence parents had no responsibility. But now, control over procreation (material capacity) due to ARTs has given new moral responsibilities to parents. But at the same time, he takes a dim view of parental compulsions, making these responsibilities “prima facie” rather than absolute (allowing parents to balance moral responsibilities) (p. 56).

In the third chapter the author rejects the famous principle of procreative beneficence (PPB) by Julian Savulescu (2001). According to PPB, parents have a moral obligation to select the embryo which would have the best possible life with respect to health, intelligence, and other possible qualities. Battisti finds this idea repugnant, claiming that it focuses on impersonal reasons. The author argues that PPB is a preference rather than a principle, and parents therefore want to take DNA to a superhuman level. One's moral responsibility should be to cause no harm to anyone.

After rejecting the theories based on PPB, in chapter four, Battisti introduces his theory and models based on person-affecting morality. Of particular note is the Minimum Threshold Model (MTM), according to which embryo selection (PGD) by choosing one embryo eliminates the remaining embryos. This is unethical and is an "identity affecting procedure" (p.128). Therefore, a non-identity-affecting procedure is necessary; with Genome Editing (rGE), the DNA of the embryo can be corrected and no selection would have to be made in the first place, resulting in "Greater Moral Obligations" for the parents. In this way, if control over technology increases, then procreative autonomy decreases and moral responsibilities increase.

After proposing the Great Moral Obligation View, Battisti faced many critics, which he discusses in chapter five. The author's entire thesis is based on the argument that rGE is a non-identity-affecting procedure (p.152). The author has responded to various objections in this chapter, the main one being the identity objection: changing the DNA of the embryo changes the entire human being. However, the author claims that merely eliminating the genetic disorder in the DNA does not change the identity of the embryo. In this way, Battisti proves that rGE is undoubtedly a non-identity-affecting procedure, but it is up to the parents of each child how they uphold their moral responsibility.

In continuation to chapter five, chapter six focuses more on genetic enhancement and the Child's Right to an Open Future (CROF). In this chapter, the author argues that if changes are made in the DNA of the embryo to make the child healthy or intelligent or to enhance the DNA, then parents are not in any way imposing their wishes or dreams on the child. Rather, they are providing further opportunities for the child, which is in accordance with CROF. Furthermore, parents are not obliged to make their children superhuman (in this way it will not be a burden on them, nor will it be their personal intention) but only to provide a reasonable range of opportunities for enhancement.

Chapter seven focuses more on the attitudes and intentions of prospective parents than the consequences (person-affecting perspective). In short, whether the child is harmed or not by the parents' procreative choice, but the parents' intentions were evil then they are morally evil. In this chapter, on the basis of the Parent-Child Relationship principle, he also rehabilitates the view of Bold Restriction of Procreative Autonomy, proposing that moral reasons exist for preferring ARTs - including ectogenesis and Genome Editing - to normal reproduction by all potential parents.

The ethical values of ARTs are often overlooked, and this constitutes the main concern of this book. Each chapter of this book has been arranged in a commendable manner. Moreover, the author has achieved conceptual depth for each claim relating to ethical concerns for the well-being of future children. Along with conceptual depth, Battisti has supported each view and model with clear and relevant examples for the readers. At the same time, each theory has been defended in a logical manner.

While I have no doubt that the book has a good grip on its theoretical approach, the practical implications of all the models and views are very weak. The author focuses more on abstract ethical analysis related to the procreative responsibilities of reproductive technologies that will be available in the future. Therefore, for current clinical professionals and lawmakers, this analysis is of limited benefit.

The significance of procreative responsibilities and moral obligations are clearly highlighted, but no mention is made of practical implications that could be helpful for prospective parents, medical professionals or policymakers. Moreover, while presenting all the theories and logical arguments, Battisti has ignored the socio-economic barriers, which would allow only society's wealthiest to access rGE. Where principles are not applicable to those people who can hardly afford IVF by saving.

Finally, there is a contradiction in the author's views: he rejects the principles in certain situations but accepts in others. For example, the author had earlier rejected Bold Restriction of Procreative Autonomy but accepted it in the last chapter to support the parent-child relationship principle. Nonetheless, Davide Battisti's book is the outcome of a thorough investigation that makes it informative and thought-provoking.