

# AMA Announcement: Monday 11/27 1PM EST - Rivka Weinberg on procreative ethics, bioethics and metaphysics of life and death

BernardJOrtcutt<sup>1</sup> and r/Science AMAs<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

## Abstract

The mods of /r/philosophy are pleased to announce an upcoming AMA by Rivka Weinberg, Professor of Philosophy at Scripps College, who works on procreative ethics, bioethics and the metaphysics of life and death. She is the author of *The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation Might Be Permissible* (OUP, 2015). Professor Weinberg will be joining us on Monday November 27th at 1PM EST to discuss issues in procreative ethics, bioethics and more. Hear it from her: Rivka Weinberg I'm Professor of Philosophy at Scripps College, which is one of the Claremont Colleges, in way too sunny California. I grew up in Brooklyn (before it was cool), worked my way through Brooklyn College as a paralegal, and got my PhD. from the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor. Most of my philosophical work has focused on the ethics and metaphysics of creating people. It still surprises me that so many people just go ahead and create an entire new human without really thinking through what they are doing to that person. It surprises me even more that so many people seem to think that life is inherently good and that living is a privilege and a treat. I find that outlook very hard to understand, though I haven't given up trying. My book, *The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation May Be Permissible*, is a culmination of my many years of thinking about what we are doing when we create a person. As the title reveals, I think we are imposing life's risks on that person, and I consider when and why that set of risks may be permissible to impose. Although it might seem foreign to think about having a baby as imposing life's risks on someone, I don't think it's as counterintuitive a conception of procreation as it might initially seem. It's not odd to think that a teenager shouldn't have a baby because that baby will have lots of disadvantages, i.e., face the high degree of significant life risks that are associated with being born to teen parents. It's not unusual to think that people who carry genes for terrible diseases, such as Tay Sachs, should try to make sure that they don't partner with another carrier and bear a child who will have to suffer so terribly. Many people think that they shouldn't have children who would be at a high risk for a life of abject poverty. And those are all ways of thinking about whether the life risks we impose on those we create are permissible for us to impose. So that is my framework for thinking about procreative ethics. Within that framework, I think about what kind of act procreation is, whether it is always wrong, whether metaphysical puzzles such as Parfit's famous non-identity problem make it almost always permissible (short answer: so not!), and what makes someone parentally responsible. In my book, I arrive at principles of procreative permissibility based on a broadly contractualist framework of permissible risk imposition. I am currently finishing up some papers on whether parental responsibility has a set endpoint, or indeed any endpoint; and on some aspects of risk imposition that are unique to, and uniquely problematic for, procreative acts. I am also thinking a lot about pointlessness, about how life is not the kind of thing that can have a point or purpose, and whether we can rationally find that disappointing or even tragic. I probably should have thought that through before I had children who now have to live pointless lives, like everyone else. Ah well. Fun fact: I have two children, and ten siblings. Links of Interest: Her book: *The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation Might Be Permissible* An article reviewing David Benatar's antinatalist book (*Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence*): "Is Having Children Always Wrong?" NewBooksNetwork podcast interview on her book "The Moral Complexity of Sperm Donation" Short piece in Quartz: "Is it unethical to have children in the era of climate change?" Another short piece in Quartz: "When is it immoral to have children?" AMA Please feel free to post questions for Professor Weinberg here. She will look at this thread before she starts and begin with some questions from here while the initial questions in the new thread come in. Please join us in welcoming Professor Rivka Weinberg to our community!

[REDDIT](#)

## **AMA Announcement: Monday 11/27 1PM EST - Rivka Weinberg on procreative ethics, bioethics and metaphysics of life and death**

BERNARDJORTCUTT [R/SCIENCE](#)

The mods of [/r/philosophy](#) are pleased to announce an upcoming AMA by [Rivka Weinberg](#), Professor of Philosophy at Scripps College, who works on procreative ethics, bioethics and the metaphysics of life and death. She is the author of [The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation Might Be Permissible](#) (OUP, 2015).

Professor Weinberg will be joining us on Monday November 27th at 1PM EST to discuss issues in procreative ethics, bioethics and more. Hear it from her:

### **Rivka Weinberg**

I'm Professor of Philosophy at Scripps College, which is one of the Claremont Colleges, in way too sunny California. I grew up in Brooklyn (before it was cool), worked my way through Brooklyn College as a paralegal, and got my PhD. from the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor.

Most of my philosophical work has focused on the ethics and metaphysics of creating people. It still surprises me that so many people just go ahead and create an entire new human without really thinking through what they are doing to that person. It surprises me even more that so many people seem to think that life is inherently good and that living is a privilege and a treat. I find that outlook very hard to understand, though I haven't given up trying. My book, *The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation May Be Permissible*, is a culmination of my many years of thinking about what we are doing when we create a person. As the title reveals, I think we are imposing life's risks on that person, and I consider when and why that set of risks may be permissible to impose.

Although it might seem foreign to think about having a baby as imposing life's risks on someone, I don't think it's as counterintuitive a conception of procreation as it might initially seem. It's not odd to think that a teenager shouldn't have a baby because that baby will have lots of disadvantages, i.e., face the high degree of significant life risks that are associated with being born to teen parents. It's not unusual to think that people who carry genes for terrible diseases, such as Tay Sachs, should try to make sure that they don't partner with another carrier and bear a child who will have to suffer so terribly. Many people think that they shouldn't have children who would be at a high risk for a life of abject poverty. And those are all ways of thinking about whether the life risks we impose on those we create are permissible for us to impose.

So that is my framework for thinking about procreative ethics. Within that framework, I think about what kind of act procreation is, whether it is always wrong, whether metaphysical puzzles such as Parfit's famous non-identity problem make it almost always permissible (short answer: so not!), and what makes someone parentally responsible. In my book, I arrive at principles of procreative permissibility based on a broadly contractualist framework of permissible risk imposition.

I am currently finishing up some papers on whether parental responsibility has a set endpoint, or indeed any endpoint; and on some aspects of risk imposition that are unique to, and uniquely problematic for, procreative acts. I am also thinking a lot about pointlessness, about how life is not the kind of thing that can have a point or purpose, and whether we can rationally find that disappointing or even tragic. I probably should have thought that through before I had children who now have to live pointless lives, like everyone else. Ah well.

Fun fact: I have two children, and ten siblings.

### **Links of Interest:**

Her book: [The Risk of a Lifetime: How, When, and Why Procreation Might Be Permissible](#)

An article reviewing David Benatar's antinatalist book (*Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence*): ["Is Having](#)

[Children Always Wrong?"](#)

[NewBooksNetwork podcast interview on her book](#)

["The Moral Complexity of Sperm Donation"](#)

Short piece in Quartz: ["Is it unethical to have children in the era of climate change?"](#)

Another short piece in Quartz: ["When is it immoral to have children?"](#)

#### AMA

Please feel free to post questions for Professor Weinberg here. She will look at this thread before she starts and begin with some questions from here while the initial questions in the new thread come in.

Please join us in welcoming Professor Rivka Weinberg to our community!

---

[READ REVIEWS](#)

[WRITE A REVIEW](#)

#### CORRESPONDENCE:

##### DATE RECEIVED:

November 23, 2017

##### DOI:

10.15200/winn.151137.73053

##### ARCHIVED:

November 22, 2017

##### CITATION:

BernardJOrcutt , r/Science ,  
AMA Announcement: Monday  
11/27 1PM EST - Rivka  
Weinberg on procreative ethics,  
bioethics and metaphysics of  
life and death, *The Winnower*  
4:e151137.73053 , 2017 , DOI:  
[10.15200/winn.151137.73053](https://doi.org/10.15200/winn.151137.73053)

© et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and redistribution in any medium, provided that the original author and source are credited.

