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Can a child sue its parents for having been born handicapped? Have people living in the present any moral obligation to future generations and populations, including the obligation to continue the race? Do potential people have rights? And if they do, is the right not to be born miserable of equal weight and status with the right to be born happy? Such question--as troubling as they are unavoidable in an age of unprecedented medical advances, genetic engineering, and demographic forecasting--strain the categories and assumptions of traditional ethical theories. In Genethics, David Heyd provides the first systematic exposition of moral principles on which to base decisions concerning the existence, number, and identity of future people. Challenging recent work by Derek Parfit and others, Heyd argues for a "person-affecting" theory of intergenerational justice, one that characterizes value by its effects on the interests and desires of human beings. Potential people, he claims, do not have moral status. Reproductive choices may therefore be guided only by reasons relating to the desires and ideals of those who already exist or of those who are going to exist independently of our choice. Heyd's approach resolves many paradoxes in intergenerational justice, while offering a major test case for the question of the limits of ethics.

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