

Maternal Consumption of Alcohol and Responsibility in Pregnancy

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Monash University, Australia

Date: 23 November 2017 (Thursday)
Time: 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Venue: Room 205, 2/F, Esther Lee Building
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin
(5-8 mins walk from the University MTR Station)
Registration: <https://www.med.cuhk.edu.hk/registration/view.php?id=352558>
All are welcome / Free Admission

Abstract

Internationally, the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy is increasingly recognized as a significant public health concern, since alcohol is known to cross the placenta and can have significant teratogenic effects on the developing fetus. Prenatal alcohol exposure is now one of the leading causes of preventable birth anomalies and can have life-long negative consequences for the resulting child. There is a growing bioethical discussion of the ethics of the maternal consumption of alcohol, and of different strategies for preventing such consumption. This paper contributes to this by responding to a recent paper by Wilkinson, Skene, De Crespigny and Savulescu, who argue that legal interventions to prevent harm to a future child are justified, regardless of the moral status of the fetus. I argue Wilkinson et al rely on a decontextualised and overly individualized conception of maternal responsibility that fails to take account of the ways in which structural exclusions and social vulnerabilities contribute to harm to future persons. As such, the preventative interventions they propose risk reiterating these exclusions and vulnerabilities (which in the Australian context are related to the history of colonialism). Instead, an alternative conception of maternal responsibility is required, one that takes account of the social and embodied relationships entailed in pregnancy.

Biography

Catherine Mills is Associate Professor of Bioethics and an Australian Research Council Future Fellow in the Monash Bioethics Centre, Monash University. Her work focuses on ethical issues that arise in human reproduction, especially relating to prenatal testing and other reproductive technologies, and ideas about maternal responsibility. She is the author of numerous journal articles and chapters, as well as 3 sole authored books, most recently *Biopolitics* (2017, Routledge).

