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## Bioethics Session 12 Handout: The Non-Identity Problem

### Harming-by-Creating

(i) When is it the case that **if \_\_ had happened I would never have existed?**

Flesh out in your mind some alternative history of the world, some way in which things might have gone differently.

#### Genetic Essentialism

I can say of a person in that alternative history, 'if things had gone differently that would have been *me*' only if he/she is genetically the same as me (or very similar to me).

#### Essentialism about Origins

I can say of a person in that alternative history, 'if things had gone differently that would have been *me*' only if he/she comes into being the same way I did (conceived by the same parents at the same time, in the same way).

#### Psychological Essentialism

I can say of a person in that alternative history, 'if things had gone differently that would have been *me*' only if he/she is psychologically the same as me (or very similar to me) (at some point in his or her life).

(ii) What does it mean to say '**it would have been better for me never to have existed**'?

One answer: if I had never existed I would have been better off than I actually am.

Better: I should prefer states of affairs in which I never exist to the actual state of affairs.

### The Non-Identity Problem

This looks like a plausible principle.

*The Person-Affecting Principle*      If you don't harm anyone, then you don't do anything wrong.

But we very rarely harm-by-creating, so this principle would appear to imply, implausibly, that we very rarely do wrong by creating.