The Working Group for the
OSU Center for Ethics and Human Values
and
The Ohio State University
Philosophy Department

Present a Public Colloquium with
Professor David Benatar
University of Cape Town, South Africa

“The Limits of Reproductive Freedom”

Abstract:
In this presentation I shall argue that the strength or scope of the right to reproductive freedom currently recognized in liberal democracies needs to be reconsidered, such that it does not include a right to engage in very risky or harmful procreation. More specifically, I argue that if there would be no right to impose risk X of harm Y to some other person in non-reproductive contexts, then there should be no right to do so in reproductive contexts. Thus, some (but not all) methods, including some coercive methods, of preventing or discouraging such reproduction are morally acceptable.

I consider two main arguments against my thesis. First, I consider the non-identity argument that future people cannot be harmed by being brought into existence. Second, and in much more detail, I consider the argument that, although the interests of future people are important, these ought to be outweighed by their parents’ right to reproductive freedom. After discerning different senses of a right to reproductive freedom, I consider four arguments for the special importance of reproductive freedom. I argue that none of them are sufficient to undermine my thesis.

Because of the long history of bias and arbitrary discrimination in curtailments of reproductive freedom, I suggest how bias might be avoided in deciding how severe a harm must be to defeat a right to reproductive freedom.

Tuesday, March 2, 2010
014 University Hall
4:30 p.m.