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Teresa Iglesias

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *IVF and Justice: Moral, Social and Legal Issues related to Human in vitro Fertilization*

Teresa Iglesias

*The Linacre Centre, London, 1990. xii & 175, index. £9.75*

This book provides a detailed examination of several of the moral issues raised by in vitro fertilization. Its primary concern is with those moral questions raised by the status of the very early embryo. Most of the argumentation in the book is for the conclusion that the human embryo, from conception, is a person. The practical implication of this conclusion is that IVF does not, and as a practical matter cannot, respect the embryo as a person and so must be judged morally unacceptable.

Six of the seven chapters in this book were written and published in journals and books between 1984 and 1987. The effect of collecting them, providing a common introduction, and adding a chapter on the analogy between brain death and the beginning of human life, is a tightly woven network of complementary arguments for the claims that the early embryo is a person and that IVF violates the rights of that person. Consequently, the repetition which is unavoidable in a collection of this kind, and the absence of a single, systematic line of reasoning do not detract from the value of this book.

The first two chapters deal with general questions in medical ethics, and with the medical reality and ethos of IVF. The main point is that IVF *cannot* treat the embryo in the way a person should be treated. Most fundamentally, the problem is that those who practice IVF have never, and, in the nature of the case cannot, take the welfare of the newly conceived individual to be the paramount moral consideration which would override social and scientific interests as well as the desires of prospective parents for a healthy baby. The most interesting and novel part of this discussion is the author's persuasive argument that there cannot be a "simple" case of IVF in which the standard moral objections are avoided.

Underlying the conclusions of these early chapters is the conviction that the early embryo is a person. The author's arguments for this conviction are developed at length in the remaining five chapters. Two sorts of argument are presented: criticisms of the positions which deny that the embryo is a person from conception, and a constructive account of why the early embryo is correctly judged to be a human individual, and of why all living humans are persons.

The critical discussion of the variations on the view that the early embryo is not a person contains little that is completely new. But it is a helpful and competent analysis. It is helpful because it addresses virtually all the objections to the view that the embryo is a person from conception, and states these objections clearly and fairly. Much of the argumentation is philosophical, but the author carefully avoids the analytic technicalities and obscurity of much philosophical writing. The author does a particularly good job of laying bare the philosophical assumptions behind the central objections: the mind/body dualism underlying the Lockean view of the person as a self-conscious being is exposed and criticized effectively; the reductionistic mechanistism implicit in much of the philosophical and

scientific literature on the beginning of human life is identified for what it is; and the questionable assumptions behind the prevalent view of rights which links the possession of rights to the actual presence of desires and interests are effectively addressed.

The competence of the critical discussion is most evident in the author's replies to objections. Her answers, though not all equally compelling, are carefully spelled out and abound with common sense. Her response to the objection based on the belief that the natural wastage of embryos is at least as great as that involved in IVF is a good example: nature is not a moral agent but we are.

The critical discussion of opposed views culminates in a capable dissection of the common analogy between the beginning and the end of life. The analogy is that just as we all now believe that brain death is the end of a person's life, so we should also be willing to believe that there is no life before brain activity exists. Iglesias explains why brain death constitutes the end of a person's life, and thus shows that brain death properly understood does not have the implication the analogy suggests but instead provides evidence that conception is the beginning of a person's life. For when the whole brain is incapable of further function, the organism cannot function as a whole and so dies (that is why brain death constitutes death of the organism), whereas in the case of the developing embryo there is organic functioning of the whole before brain activity exists, indeed from conception.

The author's construction account of why the human embryo is a human being, and so a person, from conception is less developed than her criticism of alternative positions. Moreover, it is not gathered in any single chapter but dispersed throughout the book. Here again, many of the ideas and arguments are familiar: the embryo is a living, developing organism from the time of conception; its development is continuous, so that there is no point at which we can suppose that it changes from one kind of thing into another, and so on.

Two aspects of this account are worth noting: First, Iglesias's analysis was developed before the appearance of Norman Ford's challenging arguments in *When Did I Begin?* Iglesias' response to this work would be most welcome.

Secondly, Iglesias draws some conclusions about twinning and recombination from the philosophical biology she develops, namely, that while there can be fragmentation of living things, there can be no fusion and splitting of living beings as total wholes, and so no organically unstable embryos (p. 101). This *might* be an important contribution to the discussion of twinning and recombination, but needs development. In particular, the implications of this point for the debate about the significance of twinning and recombination are not developed. Suppose that embryos are not organically unstable and continue, as long as they exist, to be the same organism. This is compatible with an embryo ceasing to exist and several others coming to be from its parts, or even with these parts joining with other embryos or parts of other embryos. Such possibilities raise anew the basic question about twinning and recombination: in what sense can something capable of this kind of behavior be a human individual?

In short, although not a definitive treatment of the issues it discusses, this book is a solid contribution to the literature. It provides an excellent introduction to the issues, and will repay thoughtful study. It is a good example of the serious, traditional moral analysis which is being promoted by the Linacre Centre in London. Unfortunately, the Linacre Centre does not have a North American distributor for its publications. They are available only directly from the Linacre Centre: 60 Grove End Road, London NW8 9NH.

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