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Games People Play with Abortion Data

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The latest artifice to be used by the pro-abortion movement is to introduce further confusion as to the status of the early developing human being. This is a continuation of the strategy which suggested that "we don't know" when life begins. That strategy became obsolete with the perfection of in-vitro fertilization. It is ludicrous to suggest that we do not know when life begins when we can make life begin in a laboratory in a petri dish. Life begins at the beginning, as we now can demonstrate, by the union of the sperm and the ovum.

The next strategy was to invent a new term, "preembryo," to make it possible to dispose of frozen embryos after in-vitro fertilization. The term "embryo" traditionally has defined the first eight weeks of intrauterine development. The term "preembryo" was first popularized in the Tennessee frozen embryo case when Junior L. Davis sued to force his wife to destroy embryos prepared for in-vitro fertilization.¹ Both the attending physician, Dr. Ray King, and the legal expert in the case, John A. Robertson, referred to the frozen embryos as "preembryos." The judge pointed out, however, that in all of his notes, Doctor King had used the term "embryo" to describe what he now wished to formalize as a "preembryo." Similarly, Mr. Robertson, testifying as to the status of what he called "preembryos," had, in all of his writings in the legal literature, previously referred to the same stages of human development as "embryos." The term "preembryo" is the latest in a long line of terms manufactured to suggest that some unborn children are less than human beings deserving of protection.

Another recent strategy is to quibble about the so-called "moment" of conception. Fertilization in human beings consists in the following process:

1. The sperm head gets to the surface of the ovum and emits an enzyme which opens a path for the genetic material of the sperm (pronucleus) to enter the ovum.
2. The sperm's pronucleus makes its way to the ovum's pronucleus. (12 hours)

3. The pronuclei fuse to form a zygote. (2 hours)
4. The nucleus reproduces itself and divides into two daughter cells (18 hours).

The total process is 32 hours or less. When it "begins" is subject to interpretation. Is it the entry of the sperm into the ovum? Is it the fusion of the pronuclei? Is it the first cell division? Whatever point you use, it is obvious that the process is clearly over *before* abortion, either surgical or chemical, is even a possibility.

An Added Uncertainty

Another uncertainty to be introduced is the allegation that the zygote may become a hydatiform mole or an ovarian teratoma and not a human being. Lejeune has demonstrated, however, that neither of these tumors is of zygotic origin. The hydatiform mole is derived entirely from paternal germ cell material and the ovarian teratoma is derived from chromosomal material entirely of maternal origin.

The spectre of possible "re-combination" of two embryos into a single being has been proposed as bringing into question individuation as a characteristic of the zygote or early embryonic stages.² Such combination of embryos in mice has been demonstrated in the laboratory.³ In order to effect such combination, the zona pellucida must be removed from each embryo by either a proteolytic enzyme or a mechanical process. The two embryos, devoid of the zona pellucida, must then be squeezed together through a micropipette to achieve combination of embryos. The function of the zona pellucida is to prevent contiguous embryos from combining, and to allow for such a combination to occur spontaneously, two embryos in the same state of development would have to lose their zona pellucidae simultaneously. There is no convincing evidence that this actually occurs in human beings and the chimera and mosaic occurrences alleged to prove combination will not bear scrutiny.⁴

Twinning of identical twins with identical genotypes can occur after fertilization. It has recently been suggested that, because twinning is possible prior to gastrulation, that abortion prior to gastrulation would not be murdering in a moral sense because "there is no individual to be the personal referent of such an action."⁵ The zygote, however, is either one individual human being or potentially two individual human beings of identical genetic makeup. Why is murder mitigated because we do not know whether we are killing one individual or two? It would seem more reasonable to say that moral culpability is increased by the possibility that one might potentially be killing two rather than one human beings. If I burn down my enemy's house intending only to kill him, but find out that he had a visitor who was his identical twin brother, am I less or more guilty of murder when his twin brother dies in the fire?

The theory of delayed animation has also been resurrected by some recent authors.⁶ It would seem, for a biologist, that the soul is best understood as the vital principle of the living person. Where a living human

being exists, a soul exists and when the person ceases to be animated by a soul he is no longer a live human being. The concept of a soul as something which comes to take possession of a living organism, as a ghost comes to take possession of a haunted house, is difficult to factor into developmental biology. What is more, it creates some possible problems for the other end of life. If the determination of death defines the time when the soul leaves the body, is it possible to posit a situation of deterioration when the soul leaves early or an abrupt and unexpected death when the soul remains, reluctant to make an unprepared departure?

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, faced with the reality that its definition of a "contraceptive" as an agent with the purpose of preventing the union of the sperm and the ovum (as the term "contraceptive" implies) was not full support of its political agenda, arbitrarily decided to change the definition. Some agents (such as combination pills, minipills, progestin-only pills, injectables such as Provera or implatables such as Norplant and IUD's) exert their action after conception to prevent the implantation of the blastocyst. These agents are not contraceptives in the traditional sense, but abortifacients. The hidden agenda in the redefinition of "contraception" was to blur this distinction between contraceptives and abortifacients by defining an agent which alters the endometrium to interfere with implantation as a "contraceptive."

The invention of the term "preembryo" correlates with the redefinition of contraception. The so-called "preembryo" is said to become an "embryo" at the time of (surprise!) implantation.

Matter of Speculation

The true incidence of spontaneous miscarriage is a matter of speculation, with a broad range of estimates based on various methodologies of prediction. Characteristically, those who are in favor of unlimited early induced abortion use the highest figures, alleging that over half of conceptions are spontaneously aborted.⁷ Abortion, then, is only an imitation of what nature is doing by eliminating early stages of development. It is a non-sequitur, of course, to conclude that we should be free to do by intention what occurs by natural accident. No one rationally suggests that because many people fall off high buildings that we should be free to push them off.

Likewise, some theologians think that it would be "sacrilegious" to propose that the Creator was such a "bungler" that He would allow immediate ensoulment of the zygote when such a high degree of "wastage" was in store.⁸ The same sort of "bungling" could be attributed, presumably, to the ensoulment of infants born into Third World cultures where infant mortality is rampant. Survival from conception to eight or twelve weeks of gestation is certainly brief. Measured against the time-clock of eternity, even a full lifetime of three score and ten years can be trivialized. The infinite God of Creation may truly be inscrutable in His

evaluation of the various stages of life's continuum, brief or long.

How are we to evaluate the kinds of theological and philosophical speculation which seem to give aid and comfort to the pro-abortion movement? Quite clearly, most authors are men of good will who intend to give a level of precision to pro-life positions which will buttress our political posture. There are nuances in theology and philosophy, but politics is also a nuanced art. What is good theology is not necessarily good public policy. The pro-abortion movement has achieved monumental political success by distorting language, muddying issues and withholding the truth from the public with the tacit assistance of the media. The central themes of the pro-life movement are irrefutable and should be asserted categorically and without ambiguity.

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