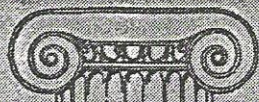
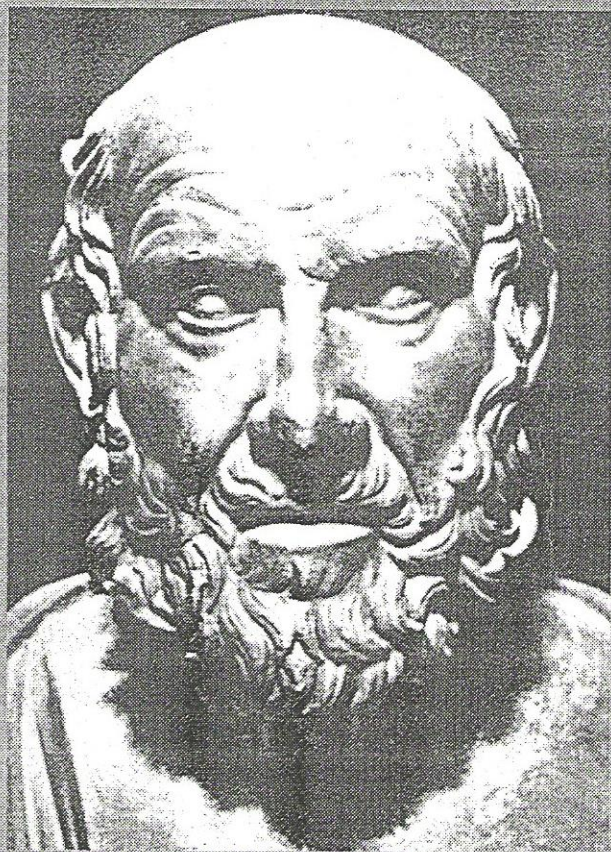


PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE



ΑΝΑΤΥΠΟ
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CONDEMNATION OR ACCEPTANCE?**

ΑΝΑΤΥΠΟ ΕΚ ΤΟΥ

PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE

Volume II

edited by K. J. BOUDOURIS, σελ. 64-67

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ARTIFICIAL HUMAN REPRODUCTION: CONDEMNATION OR ACCEPTANCE?

During the last years many surveys and statistical works have been reporting the phenomenon of the reduction of human reproductive ability and inform us about the consequences.¹ The problem is related with the famous ecological problem, that is the pollution of the environment, the biotopes and the seas, the loss of the ozone's zone, the over cultivation of the soil and other forms of misuse, as the pollution from chemicals fluids, such as the pesticides and industrial waste, affect the fertility of human beings negatively.

However, the new achievements of contemporary medicine and especially of genetics, can counteract this problem. Genetics offer the humans an opportunity to confront the problems of their infertility, in the lab.

The Christian ethics, apart from the issues which are related with the ecological problem, is also seriously concerned with the bioethical problems. A part of this set of issues is the assisted human reproduction : the artificial insemination and the in-vitro fertilization.

In Greece and in other countries, where assisted reproduction is being practiced we witness this paradoxical phenomenon:² a great number of women seek medical help in order to get rid of an undesirable pregnancy (estimated 200.000 per year in Greece), when at the same time, many other families spend a lot of money, time, pain and hope to make their dream for a child come true. For that they have recourse to various methods of assisted reproduction.

The Orthodox Church hasn't adopted an official attitude on this issue yet. But,

there is not an explicitly expressed position in Christian Ethics either. Yet, some orthodox researchers work on this issue in order to formulate a specific position and perspective. The ethical evaluation become a difficult task under the light of continuous new discoveries in genetics, and change the existing data there of. The lack of information and knowledge about the methods of artificial reproduction, often leads either to condemnation of the methods, or to their complete acceptance for the sake of procreation.

It is difficult in the space of time allotted to me to analyze all the methods of artificial reproduction, which could be acceptable from an ethical point of view or are being condemned unquestionably. Here we simply remark that the homologous artificial insemination or the homologous in-vitro fertilization, that is the use of the sperm and the ovum only from the spouses, which takes place in the lab with medical assistance is one of the methods of assisted reproduction currently used. Here the couple remains intact.³

In opposition, the intrusion of a third part in the process, that is a sperm or an ovum from a donor (heterologous fertilization), creates serious problems and objections for the acceptance of the method by the Christian Orthodox Ethics. The Orthodox researchers reject unanimously the heterologous reproduction arguing that the involvement of a third part creates a problem in the legitimacy of the couple and in its procreation. In fact, they see in this latter form of assisted reproduction a *peculiar form of adultery* and they even go so far as to speak of a *falsification of mankind*.⁴

According to Christian ethics the union of human gametes and the fertilization of the ovum constitute a secret and sacred moment. Therefore, human life is acknowledged and respected from the very first moment of the conception. For that reason the in-vitro fertilization cannot be automatically and easily accepted and very often the substitution of God by specialist Doctor is seen with suspicion.

On the other hand, however, the Christian tradition respects the medical science and every it has done to comport human pain and suffering.

Furthermore, there are other combinations of methods, such as the one surrogate mothers, which can be interpreted differently ethical point of view. In some cases the intrusion of a third part in reproduction could be tolerated. For example the case of the homologous in-vitro fertilization and the transfer of the embryo in the body of the surrogate mother -only for the period of pregnancy- and its return to its parents, attracts the last of ethical objections, and it could be envisaged as an offer and a sacrifice, free of pecuniary interacts.⁵

However, when children are created in the environment of a lab and given to sterile couples, serious questions arise, as to a *human being with five (5) parents and one (1) doctor, who has regulated and controlled the whole process of reproduction?*

The orthodox writers, who have studied the issue of the artificial human

reproduction, have accepted and stated, that the homologous artificial insemination and the in-vitro fertilization could be acceptable under the condition of all the fertilized eggs are transferred in the mother's uterus. Moreover the new method of fertilization: the intra-cytoplasmic-sperm-injection (ICSI) gives hope to sterile couples. there is no use of donor sperm, but sperm is taken from the husband, even if he is azoospermic (azoospermia). This method should be endorsed by the Orthodox Church. Consequently, Christian ethics does not oppose medical developments, when they respect human life. Nevertheless, it is uneasy about the contribution of new methods of genetics in the creation of a new family ethos.

For example, when the in-vitro fertilization offers homosexual couples the opportunity to have children, Christian ethics cannot but oppose such an option, same for cloning methods. The cryopreservation and the experimentation on human embryos are generally speaking ethically unacceptable practices.

Thus, the answer to the first question of this paper for condemnation or for acceptance of the artificial human reproduction depends on to the degree of the intervention of medicine in what the Christian faith believes that it belongs to God's province. The This ethical view, is endorsed by a large number of persons, who have not solved their problems of their infertility yet, either because they lack of information, or because they distrust the new methods of assisted reproduction.

Conclusively:

- a. The ecological problem is itself a growing problem for an ever creasing number of couples related with the problem of the infertility.
- b. Since the issues of artificial reproduction are related to many subjects such as the respect of human life from the moment of conception and the sanctity of human person, Christian ethics should examine the new achievements of genetics carefully, before pronouncing itself for or against it.
- c. People ought to be better informed. Media could plan an important role by presenting the new methods with clarity and accuracy without sensationalism, which hides "the truth of the facts".
- d. The reservations expressed towards the new biomedical achievements is understandable and natural. However in genetic science has a lot to offer. It would be fair to speak only of the dangers of cloning in humans and the experimentation on human embryos, when the many psychological and social problems pertaining into human infertility and sterility could be solved thanks the new medical achievements.
- e. Finally, the contact and the dialogue of the Christian ethics with the Medicine could offer positive results, when through a fair unbarred approach, new perspectives could open up and solutions be given to those who are concerned with the respect and dignity of the human being.

NOTES

1. Michael Lemonick. "Not so fertile ground". *Time* 9/1994, and "What's wrong with our sperm?". *Time* 3 1996.

2. John Breck. "Biomedical technology: Of the Kingdom or of the Cosmos?", *St. Vladimir's Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1/1988, pp. 5-26.

3. cf. Anestis Kesselopoulos, "Bioethical problems in School and in Society", 2nd Conference of Crete's Theologians Union, Irakleio 1996.

4. George Mantzaridis. *Introduction to Ethics. Ethics in the crisis of the present and in the challenge of the future*, Thessaloniki 1995, p. 92.

5. In Thessaloniki, a case of a surrogate mother appeared who had carried the embryo of her brother and her sister-in-law, with homologous in-vitro fertilization and she gave it back to them after the birth. cf., Vassilios Fanaras, "The issue of the Surrogate Mothers, A glance of an issue". *Koinonikes Tomes*. No. 74, April 1996, pp. 182-183.

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