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BOOK REVIEW

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IVF and Justice: Moral, Social and Legal Issues Related to In Vitro Fertilisation. Teresa Iglesias. (Pp 175; £9.75.) London: The Linacre Centre for Health Care Ethics. 1991.

Intrinsic to the human condition is our susceptibility to outside influence. Social acceptability of a practice tends to alter our moral outlook to accommodate that practice. These accommodations in social conscience do not, however, question the basic correctness or otherwise of that practice. In vitro fertilisation forms a case in point. It marked a quantum scientific breakthrough in the treatment of infertility. Latterly, the unwanted side products of 'surplus' embryos have become legitimate subjects of scientific research up to the 14th day of their existence. Surrogate motherhood, the 'ownership' of children resulting from surrogate pregnancies

and the 'principle of anonymity' governing artificial insemination by donor are all issues with which society has had to grapple in consequence of the technological breakthrough which IVF represented. That these are now accepted practices may have altered their moral acceptability to many people, including the medical fraternity, but acceptability and the moral correctness of these practices are not necessarily synonymous.

Philosopher and ethicist, Teresa Iglesias, a graduate of universities in Madrid, Dublin, and Oxford, examines these complex issues, and a host of others, in this book. These issues are judged on their morality or lack of same rather than by the social acceptability barometer. The basic standpoint of this examination is Christian rather than denominational.

The book takes the form of seven chapters, each of which has been presented as a paper examining various aspects of IVF elsewhere. Now they are presented together in book form to offer a comprehensive discussion of the subject as a whole. Topics discussed include the nature of the human embryo, death and the beginning of life, and the claims of the embryo to be recognised as an individual. These topics are examined in light of the practice and consequences of IVF. The style of these chapters is somewhat irksome, each comprising a numbered set of arguments, sometimes related, sometimes not. Thus the style is reminiscent of the school-boy debater, complete with striped blazer, college cap, and tie about to enter the representative fray!

Yet, this is a weighty book dealing with weighty matters and subjects all too easily dismissed by those of us blinded by scientific success to the implications in terms of right and wrong. The legislative position of the human embryo historically is examined. The conclusion from this investigation is that the embryo has always occupied a position of 'human entity' in British law. The recent legislation allowing experimentation on human embryos is inconsistent with this historical position and with

the precepts of basic justice, according to the arguments contained herein. The status of IVF generated embryos has been changed from that of 'human entity' to disposable asset. By so doing the implication is that IVF generated embryos are 'lesser forms of humanity'. The social and legal justification for this is the greater good and benefits which accrue to others, that is, 'consequentialism', whereby the essentially immoral act of generating embryos by IVF is justified on the basis of successfully treating infertility, providing scientific research material of enormous interest, etc. Nevertheless, the pursuit of individual freedom and choice for infertile couples may have led, inadvertently, to the denial of basic human rights to the IVF generated embryos.

Fundamentally, this book asks of IVF whether the many ends justify the means. From every one of the 175 pages the answer of 'no' is screamed. Many will dismiss it as 'Catholic clap-trap' but the more reflective will find much food for thought between these covers, even if they disagree with some of the basic precepts and the ultimate conclusions.

WILLIAM REARDON

NOTICE

Journal of Genetic Counseling: call for papers

The first issue of the *Journal of Genetic Counseling*, the journal of the National Society of Genetic Counselors, will be published in early 1992. Manuscripts addressing any aspect of counselling in genetics are invited. Manuscripts and requests for additional information should be addressed to the Editor Deborah L. Eunpu, Developmental Medicine and Genetics, Albert Einstein Medical Center, 5501 Old York Road, Philadelphia, PA 19141-3098, USA. Tel: (215) 456-8706.