

Procreative Madness: The Price Our Offspring Pay For Lawlessness

by Charles Whitaker

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," December 2004

In an article entitled "Overcoming Motherhood" (*Policy Review*, December 2002/January 2003, p. 31), Christine Stolba discusses the moral and ethical challenges reproductive technologies offer men and women today. First-generation technologies, extant now for years, allow parents to control the timing and quantity of children. These technologies include contraception, abortion surgeries, in-vitro fertilization (or IVF, where conception takes place in a test tube, and the fertilized egg is then implanted into a womb for nourishment), gender-selection techniques, and genetic diagnosis (where embryos that will produce diseased or disabled children are identified).

Second-generation technologies go beyond this—far beyond. They allow parents to control the *quality* of their offspring and to enhance, rather than just treat, genes. They include:

- » *Cytoplasmic cell transfer*: To facilitate fertilization, cytoplasm from a donor is introduced into another woman's egg. Since cytoplasm holds traces of genetic material, the human being that eventually results from the fertilization of a cytoplasmic transplanted egg will have three "parents": the mother, the father, and the cytoplasmic donor. This procedure, writes Stolba, could "upend our conceptions of genetic parenthood."
- » *Ovary/Fallopian tube transplant*: After the transplant, the recipient is able to conceive, but using *implanted* eggs, the eggs of the donor woman.
- » *Uterus transplants and artificial wombs*. A "fully functional artificial womb for human beings" is evidently about six years away.

These technologies offer the potential to change the very definition of motherhood, as a typically American form of "consumer-driven . . . eugenics" develops. Building "designer babies" could become big business. Yet, bioethicists offer scant guidance as to what is right and wrong in the process. Their guiding principle is *autonomy*, which literally means "self-law." Individuals, exercising the free choice bioethicists so avidly glorify, become laws unto themselves. Some examples of individual choice gone wild:

- » What was it—the permissible exercise of free choice, therapy, or genetic enhancement—when a woman with early-onset Alzheimer's disease had her IVF-created embryos screened for the "Alzheimer" gene, then discarded all the embryos having the defective gene, accepting only the embryo without the Alzheimer gene for transplant into her body? Advocates call this sort of procedure "quality control," concluding that "failing to prevent the birth of a child with serious defects is 'immoral.'"
- » What about parents who obtain gender-selection tests on fetuses with the stated intention of aborting any fetus of the "wrong" gender? Is this decision murder, or is it equivalent to choosing a hamburger with cheese rather than one without it? Stolba points

out that, in 1970, only one in a hundred qualified physicians would screen fetuses under those circumstances; today, sixty-two would.

» What about a woman who chooses to have "babies for the explicit purpose of harvesting spare parts for themselves or loved ones"? Does such an act stem from a natural desire to provide medical care for herself or a family member, or is it perhaps the ultimate in selfishness?

» Has individualism gone out of control when people actually take action to *guarantee* that their offspring will be born handicapped? That is precisely what a deaf, lesbian couple in Maryland did. They "used sperm donated by a fifth-generation deaf man to ensure that their son and daughter would be born profoundly deaf." This is a case where the definition of wellness is turned on its head.

Although there is variation between different bioethicists, most have no difficulty with individualism unbridled to the extent that it permits these kinds of actions. Having left God out of their ethical and moral systems, they fail to recognize that He intends His law to be *the* supreme regulator of human actions. That law is fixed and absolute. It trumps the supposed "right" of the individual to make choices based on desire, convenience, and expedience. The fruit on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil has turned out to be bitter indeed.