

Friday 1100

Where There's a Will There's a Way: Reproductive Technology, Medical Ethics, and the Law

And that is easily the longest title I've typed this con.

Tore Hoie (M), Lois McMaster Bujold, W. A. (Bill) Thomasson, Sam Scheiner

“How can you arrange for your un-conceived child to inherit your possessions? What are the medical, ethical and legal implications of modern reproductive practices such as surrogate parenting, IVF after the male spouse is dead, and the use of sperm banks?”



Tore Hoie (M) says that relative to law both ethics and medicine are developing very fast.

There's no mic, which is **INSANE**.

Scheiner is a biologist at the NSF

Thomasson is a biochemist and works with the NIH grant process

Bujold was a drug admin tech in her 20s in a hospital

Freitag pediatrician and bioethicist

Hoie is a Norwegian analyzing the Health system philosophically and ethicist

Hoie defines ethics as universal, global rules, opposed to morals which are much more compartmentalized and regionalized.

We're 15 minutes in and just done with introductions, which I think probably bodes ill.

Scheiner starts with the story of the birth of the first baby that came about through genetic screening of embryos, a process which was enabled by recent advances in genetic sequencing and that process's affordability. So we have the ability to screen for genetic diseases, currently, and the ability to screen for desirable characteristics are soon to come.

Bill brings up when you have surrogate parenthood, what are the rights of the surrogate mother as opposed to the biological and/or adoptive parents and adopted children, which he says there's no clear way to balance those ethics.

Bujold is especially interested in the reproductive element, brings up that egg donors are around, not just sperm donors. She has found that every new technology gives us a choice that changes the options that we can take, and the decisions that we can take, ethically.

Freitag observes that "preventing" the "disease" in embryonic screening is simply not allowing that child to be born, which leads to people who have children with defects facing social ethical issues for making the decision to allow that child to be.

Scheiner brings up religion and how different religions approach when you become a person, contrasting Catholic and Jewish traditions (conception v. birth).

Hoie says it's important to notice that ethics is difficult, whereas morals are often easy. Cites Herb Simon as calling it "ill structured problems" which is where even with full info it's difficult to reach a final decision. Raises Syria's situation as an example of a difficult and uncertain thing to decide upon. He mentions surrogate parenting where in Norway a single man or woman can request surrogate parenting from Asian women.

Scheiner asks Freitag about her example asking "Is it more or less ethical if you have a severely impaired embryo to let it be born or not." Freitag says that it's ethical when the person bringing that embryo into the world says it is, which is obviously not something that a universal system of ethics can accommodate.

Thomasson points out that if the parents are saying "we know we'll love it and the disability doesn't matter" then you're likely to have a great child. If the parents are not interested in making that effort, then the child is probably better off not being born.

Scheiner asks if this is similar ethically to ending life for someone who is not cognizant and cannot make that choice. Freitag says that, again, it is the decision of the caretaker. Bujold observes that if somebody undertakes care and is then removed from being able to make that decision, then who inherits that decision.

Audience question about Hitler and eugenics. Scheiner says ethically there's a huge difference between killing and sterilizing cognizant individuals and screening out genetic sequences from gametes. Bujold says the difference is the government doing the deciding vs. the parents.

Audience asks about colorblindness and says it's a problem from an evolutionary standpoint when you start eliminating genetic "abnormalities." Scheiner says as an evolutionary biologist it's not likely to have an impact, that these mutations are really a small amount of our genetic variability and that new mutations are occurring all the time. Brings up sickle cell, of course, as variably beneficial. Bujold points out that eliminating variation will come side-by-side with increasing variation by similar techniques.

Audience asks about whether it's ethical for people who will require very expensive life-long care for severely disabled individuals. Hoie says the question isn't whether we have enough money or where that comes from, but what sort of society are we.

Audience brings up how governmental choices in China have led to a massive gender imbalance.

Audience asks at what point do you have the ethical and moral obligation for people to take care of each other, where the question of why didn't you have an abortion is equivalent to the question of why didn't you care for that child.

Audience asks if all this we're talking about isn't already outpaced by the rapid changes our society has already undergone.

Audience asks about population overwhelming ethical considerations. Thomasson says he actually expects stabilizing or even reducing population within 40 years. Scheiner says that he agrees, with popular estimates showing a peak and stabilization around 9 billion. Hoie points out that most Euro countries are not replacing themselves, reproductively.

Audience asks about the ethical decisions of medical personnel, an example being OctoMom's embryologist implanting 8 embryos without appropriate licensing. Freitag points out that there's clashes within the professions between the writers of medical orders and those who must carry them out.

Audience asks about capitalistic eugenics being likely. Bujold says "the other way of looking at it is they get to be the guinea pigs for a change."

Audience asks what happens when insurance companies start making the choice. Scheiner says that then you get into this complicated intersection with economics and ethics. Freitag says that it's already going on, and that the government doesn't have to pass a mandate, they just need to start a rumor. We like to believe that we are making autonomous decisions but in fact we are interdependent. Hoie says that in the NHS of his country, insurers are not a significant factor, but other decisions are somewhat governed by economic decisions.

Closing:

Scheiner says the tech is moving so fast and that SF is way ahead of the rest of the world and is a valuable tool. Bujold says that some ethical problems do have technological solutions, but others will be raised. Freitag says "When did we all decide that we should have everything we want" is something she's been thinking about a lot.

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