

The Nature and the Status of Human Embryo (Ethical Aspects)

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Abstract

According to the fundamental scientific knowledge, international organizations and committees in bioethics have adopted ethical norms that prohibit any sort of manipulations upon the human embryo. The origin and formation of the conscious human personality as well as the essence of life have always been stubborn problems for scientists and public opinion. Many a philosophical, religious-theological and psychological concepts has been developed in connection with the above problems. The human embryo bears a special ontological status: The latter is a potential human being. None of the objective facts describing continuous process of embryogenesis can be considered as proving the fact that it will develop into a "human being as such". Thus, it is evident, that at the any stage of its development, an embryo is a bearer of human dignity, so any action with respect to it is to be assessed morally. Any unborn child is a victim believed a sacrifice for the sake of those who have managed to come into the world. The special moral status of the embryo does predetermine its particular moral status.

Keywords: *human embryo, ontological status, moral status, embryo's status, abortion, potential human being*

How does a conscious individual originate and evolve? The above issue together with the problems of life essence and those of the human origin may always have been stumbling-stones for scholars and common people. A lot of philosophical, religious-theological and psychological concepts have been developed on the theme. For example: many of philosophers and psychologists agree with the idea according to which formation of the consciousness of an individual is determined by his confluence with the world of culture; the confluence itself takes places both through social communication of various kinds and the human speech. Proceeding from the above viewpoint, many of the theses prepared by abortion opponents seem non-concrete. For example, J. and B. Wilge asserted that "A fetus is recognized to be a conscious, respondent human being living an active emotional life since six month's age (and may be much earlier).

Embryo is not only a part of Mother's body. An embryo taken as a biological structure does not resemble any of her organs but represents a different human being (biologically unique and integral) developing in Mother's body. The abortion adversaries, however, keep underlining these two circumstances and, for some reason quasi pay no attention to the other evident truth: it is their "blood" and "flesh".

Identification of the concepts "human being" and "embryo" (as an object involved in social relations, the one to be in the upshot considered as a subject of perception and will) is not correct. A human embryo enjoys a special ontological status: "It is a potential human being". Being mainly of biological nature, an embryo considered from the social standpoint, in case of normal and non-artificial abortion represents an object of our particular care. Its nature lies in establishment of unique biological individuality, formation of a soul of unique structure characteristic of a future human being. None of the objective facts describing continuous process of embryogenesis can be considered as proving the fact that it will develop into a "human being as such". Furthermore, it is evident that the bigger the embryo's age is the closer it is to the human status.

The special ontological status of embryo is predetermined by its particular moral status.

At any stage of its development the embryo is a bearer of human dignity that is why any actions with respect to it needs moral assessment. Fetus will obtain a moral status by "participating" in moral relations. In our opinion, involvement of a fetus in moral relations should be considered as a criterion for its obtaining a moral

status; the above process will take place when the embryo becomes a subject of moral perception both for his mother to make a decision at a critical moment and for the human culture that having set forth the problem of the embryo's moral status does already recognize it as a subject of fundamental moral rights. Alongside with the above, the culture reveals moral features characteristic of human race such as: solidarity, call of duty, reciprocal responsibility, liberty, love and kind-heartedness.

The embryo's particular ontological and moral status first of all results in our considering the object as a subject of the relationship of ours (perception and evaluation) that are connected with clinical and investigatory medical practice. Thus, progress in research activities on embryogenesis (e.g. widening of our knowledge about embryo's capability to feel a pain) would gain in importance in the process of perfection of social norms that predetermines our relations with the embryo. The fundamental distinction between early embryo (14 days of development) and embryo proper that is usually brought as a weighty argument by many contemporary researchers serves as a conclusive proof of the above. The indicated period of embryo's development corresponds to the moment of establishment of the so-called "Primary Phase" (the period following its implantation into the wall of the uterus) from which the future human body is formed. According to ethical norms adopted by the competent international law, scientific-medical, bioethical organizations proceeding from the basic scientific knowledge available on embryogenesis, no manipulation is allowed upon the human embryo. In other words, the especial ontological and moral status of the embryo considered in the light of the latest scientific

achievements will require establishment of new international agreements to specify norms of the legal, medical and scientific ethics, and differentiate impact admissible and inadmissible towards the "potential human being".

From the morals point of view, abortion at all times would be a difficult and painful option. Recognizing the embryo's right to enjoy the human's status any case of artificial abortion shall be considered to be an evil deed. The woman who makes a decision to cease pregnancy in artificial way will always try to avoid "a greater evil". The strict legal regulations on practice of pregnancy ceasing should be believed to be the proof of the negative attitude on the site of contemporary public opinion. The number of protocols adopted in the 20th century to regulate the abortion agenda testify that at the given civilization stage, the public moral opinion (at least the part oriented to European values) somehow justifies social practice of that kind.

However we must not forget that any evil deed (even if aimed at prevention of "greater disaster") will cause a spiritual injury to the soul of any sound human i.e. we should neither humble the abortion practice nor consider it to be a deed of moral law. It may be justified only from the theoretical point of view.

Any unborn child is a victim believed a sacrifice for the sake of those who did manage to come into the world. Thus, the monument erected on the embryo remnants burial place in a common grave in one of the Los-Angeles cemeteries seems logically justified.

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Природа и статус человеческого эмбриона (этические аспекты)

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РЕЗЮМЕ

В соответствии с фундаментальными научными знаниями об эмбриогенезе Международными организациями и Биоэтическими комитетами были приняты этические нормы, запрещающие любые манипуляции с человеческим эмбрионом. Проблема становления и формирования человека как личности, наряду с вопросами о сущности жизни и происхождения человека, является наиболее сложной и трудноразрешимой для науки. Эти вопросы рассматриваются и изучаются многими философскими и психологическими концепциями. Человеческий эмбрион обладает особым онтологическим статусом: «Эмбрион - это потенциальный человек». Ни один из объективных факторов, отражающих непрерывный процесс эмбриогенеза, не может подтвердить, что родится «именно "такой" человек». Вместе с тем очевидно, что на любой стадии развития эмбрион уже является носителем человеческого достоинства и, поэтому, любые манипуляции над ними требуют моральной оценки. Каждый неродившийся ребенок - жертва, принесенная во имя благополучия уже рожденных детей. Онтологический статус эмбриона определяется его моральным статусом.

Ключевые слова: *человеческий эмбрион, онтологический статус, моральный статус, аборт, потенциальный человек*