

# Produce or Perish

## Generativity and New Reproductive Technologies

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TECHNICAL DEBATES ABOUT new reproductive technologies (NRTs) capture daily headlines. Less prominent is what theologians think. Many leave these disputes to the scientists and medical ethicists with subspecialties in the finer mechanics of artificial reproduction. Although the specialization of the professions and the withdrawal of theologians to narrower and narrower spheres of discussion yields an increased depth of knowledge, it is a mistake. Behind the controversies surrounding reproductive technologies lie equally critical religious questions about human images of fulfillment and adult generativity.

A theological perspective can draw attention to significant oversights within current conversations about the ethics of reproductive technologies. Only by comprehending complicated patterns of generativity, at heart a religious investigation of the nature of human realization, can we begin fairly to access and make moral decisions about NRTs. One contribution of theological analysis, encouraged and well done by the likes of Paul Tillich (1951-63; 1959) and others, is to reposition critical technical questions within a broader religious and cultural context.

I first "conceived" the ideas that gave rise to this article while teaching two courses, one on medical ethics and the other on feminist psychology. Reading books for the latter, like Mary Field Belenky's (et al.) *Women's Ways of Knowing* or Anne Wilson Schaef's *Women's Reality*, intensified my sensitivity to the different ways of knowing or "realities" of students in the former. At the same time, my son turned two; my husband and I wanted a second child. I had already apprehended the critical place that becoming a mother had played in my own self-understanding. But the intense pressures I felt to conceive again came unexpectedly. Despite the mutuality in our marriage, I saw in a fresh way

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how differently from my husband I meet various aspects of generativity and reproduction.

Conflicts uniquely mine as a woman—a white, middle-class North American Protestant mother and seminary professor, to be more exact—of “conceiving” in scholarly and familial ways have bolstered my critique of the dominant cultural view of generativity.<sup>1</sup> Early on, so-called “morning” sickness filled my waking and sleeping hours with nausea; ponderings that turned me inward and “diminished cognitive acuity” (Fenster, Phillips and Rapoport:1; cf. Murai and Murai; Jarrahi-Jadeh et al.) in the first and third trimester took their toll. At the same time, in an odd way these experiences enhanced my thoughts and creativity. At times I wanted to drop the whole project as strongly as I wanted to see it through for the value of the ideas. Women may not write of their varied childbearing experiences because of such mixed dynamics (cf. Suleiman 1988, 1985; Miller-McLemore 1991a, 1991b, 1992). But women and mothers have much to tell others. This article is a step in that direction.

### TROUBLING OVERSIGHTS

Decades have passed since Lawrence Kohlberg and his forerunner, Jean Piaget, suggested that a person’s ability to deal with ethical issues develops in stages, not all at once. Social, environmental, and educational influences affect that development (Kohlberg 1958, 1969; Piaget). Surprisingly, although the immense literature in medical and religious ethics usually deals with critical life-changing situations and decisions, few texts give much, if any, credence to developmental issues.

Questions of moral development have had a limited role in ethics. Even Rest’s and Goodpaster’s call, in 1982, for “interdisciplinary cooperation between psychologists and philosophers . . . or teachers of ethics,” fails to push the question of the place of psychology and developmental theory beyond the narrow context of the classroom. Few have taken it up since. Indeed, none of the renowned scholars in this field seem to consider personal readiness—psychological, moral or religious—an important factor in moral decision-making. Both abstract arguments about principles and concrete discussions about cases barely consider that persons reason from distinct stages of development, that

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<sup>1</sup> Much more could be said about generativity from the perspective of working class women and women of color. I do not presume to do so within the confines of this article. Any description of “women’s” experience herein primarily refers to white, middle-class American women. See note 7 below.

they may stand at the precipice of a life cycle crisis, and that these factors fundamentally shape their view. For the most part, scholarship conceives moral decisions in a static developmental vacuum.

This indifference is especially troublesome when ethical and medical decisions at hand involve matters integrally related to women. Men—particularly white men in Western culture—have believed that they can speak for others, especially for women and for minorities. Men have defined “health” and development for women, often to the detriment of women. Ehrenreich’s and English’s powerful historical portrayal shows that answers to the “Woman Question” have come from male physicians, philosophers, and scientists, who have usurped the “ancient powers of women” and denied “the accumulated lore of generations of mothers” (3-4). In the last decade, others have voiced similar protest (cf. Bleier 1984, 1986; Rosser, Corea 1985; Sherwin). Nonetheless, an intense “resistance of mainstream science to feminist criticism” remains (Bleier 1988:191), and research on health largely continues to exclude women both as subjects and as authors. A medical system structured and operated by men misunderstands and mistreats women.

Because debates in bioethics overlook developmental factors and repress controversial issues of gender, they ignore crucial contextual components that influence the person at the heart of the dilemma. Granted, adopting an “objective” stance helps purge “the evil spirits of prejudice, superstition, arbitrary and irrational power” (Palmer:10). But when the debate concerns reproductive organs and capacity, a dimension intrinsic to personhood and dramatically shaped by cultural mores, the abstraction of the person from the “case” and the “case” from societal pressures becomes artificial and alienating. The unquestioned reign of masculine images becomes imposing (cf. Lebacqz 1975). Whether the ethicist is a man evaluating a particular action or a woman making the choice for herself, gender identity and ideals subtly dictate how persons experience and then reflect upon reproductive technologies.

Daniel C. Maguire’s “Visit to an Abortion Clinic” illustrates this well. Maguire admits that his self-proclaimed “Philadelphia Irish Catholic male moral” stance had unavoidably prejudiced his prior conclusions. His visit, designed to break the bonds of his own biases, will do likewise for most readers. Suddenly we enter a world that the majority of ethicists and legislators who reason about abortion do not frequent. When we believe we can reason from a distance, with little or no empathy for the pain of those actually facing moral decisions, we lose contact with the reality of the dilemma. Persons, particularly “male moralists,”

might find themselves changed by venturing into such taboo territory with similar empathy (157-68).

Women have distinct understandings of what it means to be generative. Failure to recognize these perceptions leaves decisions at the mercy of faulty, one-sided, masculine appropriations of the ideal and makes medical ethical discussions of NRTs and political debates about the legalities of abortion especially problematic (cf. Miller-McLemore 1989, 1990). How can we begin to comprehend some of the issues involved in reproduction without a fuller appreciation for psychological, moral, and religious development, particularly the development of care and generativity in women's lives? Understanding the ethical and legal dilemmas of NRTs necessitates deeper comprehension of the nature of generativity in our society, as understood, obscured, and stereotyped for both men and women.

Although a person's stage of emotional or moral maturity need not determine the outcome of any particular decision, these developmental factors deserve closer consideration than they receive. By looking at matters of generativity, I share the belief that the "predominant western approach to bio-ethical issues suffers serious limitations" (Lebacqz 1987:65) and turn to a neglected conviction in contemporary theological ethics that "what we *are* is as important as what we do" (Hauerwas 1986:44). Indeed, Karen Lebacqz, Alastair MacIntyre, James M. Gustafson, William F. May (1983), and Stanley Hauerwas (1975) all seem to be searching for new language to replace a dry, removed manner of ethical reasoning: Lebacqz looks at patterns of meaning of the oppressed, MacIntyre talks about virtue, Gustafson about piety, May about covenant, Hauerwas about character. The conviction of the liberal moral tradition that we can separate impartial principles from our loyalties, identities, and our "particular histories and communities" is itself limited by the distinctive loyalties of its time (Lammers and Verhey:ix; cf. Stout). The situation calls for "thoughts . . . not yet . . . thought" (Troeltsch:1012), particularly those of feminist theology.

Michelle Stanworth divides NRTs roughly into four groups: 1) fertility control; 2) management of labor and childbirth; 3) improvement of the health and genetic characteristics of fetuses and of newborns; and 4) conceptive technologies (10-11). While I have in mind primarily the final group, my ideas have implications for the other three.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>I do not intend to take up specific quandaries of NRTs currently debated by those more qualified. Nor will I apply the concept of generativity to the particularities of NRTs within the confines of this

## THE IDEA OF GENERATIVITY AND NEW REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Erik H. Erikson first articulated the conflict between generativity—"the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation"—and stagnation as the primary focus of mature adult development (1963:266-68; 1968:138-39). Indeed, the idea of generativity is central to Erikson's corpus (Browning 1975) and constitutes the normative bedrock of his entire theory.

The current divorce between psychology and ethics results in part from Freud's extremely negative view of moral authority "holding sway" in the superego. Freud decried the dangers of the "harshly restraining, cruelly prohibiting quality" of "even ordinary normal morality" for healthy psychological development (43-44). One might assume that modern psychology tends to discredit moral thinking. Not so with Erikson. It is precisely his subtle sensitivity to normative dimensions that makes his psychological observations particularly amenable to conversation with ethicists. On this score, he departs more from orthodox psychoanalysis than he himself cared to admit. He even contends that, although psychoanalysis originally strove to differentiate itself from theology and philosophy, psychology itself must now confess that it often functions as a positive ethical science: it defines "normality" and influences history and culture; it must be recognized and judged on this basis (1970:741, 754; 1982:103).

Erikson holds out the possibility that nonpathological moral demands can govern in healthy ego development. Granted, a narrow, conventional, superego-dominated morality fosters pathological conflict. But persons can develop a higher ego-ruled ethic that allows for the possibility of creative conflict and constructions. Such capacity for ethics remains "an emergent phenomenon."

The truly ethical stage of development does not begin to be visible until adolescence and does not mature until the stages of 'generativity' and 'wisdom' which occur during the middle and later stages of adulthood. But all the preceding stages are important for later ethical capacities. The capacity for higher generativity (which is of the very essence of ethical living) has its foundations in the very beginning of life (Browning 1975:157).

The possibility of development at each of life's eight stages depends

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article. But I will demonstrate that taking a closer look at developmental understandings of the moral concept of generativity holds significant potential for enhancing the general discussion.

upon a mutual interaction among generations and an interaction among ego, soma, and society that Erikson understands to be the true nature of generativity. A "generative ethic" governs each step in ego growth, and requires of persons an initial receptivity to care and then an emerging capacity to care for others. This ethic presupposes a concern for and identification with family, with the wider horizons of community, and ultimately with succeeding generations of communities.

Although Erikson sees "generativity" as simply the adult stage of maturity, Browning characterizes it as the implicit moral and religious imperative at the core of Erikson's psychology. The vision of the generative task has "great general significance for all of his writing" (1975:24), and from its perspective, all human activities are judged. The highest good is "the 'maintenance of life'" or the "regeneration of the cycle of generations." In the idea of generativity Erikson implicitly promotes an encompassing orientation to life that Browning calls "the culture of care" (1980:20-22; 1987:5-6, 29-31).<sup>3</sup> On occasion Erikson discusses this in terms of care for what one has generated, "mutuality," "an ecology of mutual activation," or even as a modern version of the Golden Rule: "Truly worthwhile acts enhance a mutuality between the doer and the other—a mutuality which strengthens the doer even as it strengthens the other" (1964:231, 233).

The person who successfully weathers the conflict between generativity and stagnation in the second to last stage moves to life's final phase having acquired the new "virtue" of care. By the term "virtue" Erikson has in mind something fairly specific and slightly divergent from strict definitions of moralists. By "virtue" he means the "ego strength" that accrues gradually in "epigenetic" progress through life's inherent crises. The ego becomes "the seat of ethics" as it resolves each crisis with the crystallization of a new virtue. This strengthens the ego's capacity to meet the next challenge. Erikson divides this epigenesis into a hierarchical sequence of eight stages and their corresponding "crises" or conflicts. At each stage different virtues emerge in a delicate developmental balance of "strengths" and "weaknesses." Ultimately virtue depends upon 1) healthy resolution of prior conflicts and the ascending, progressive building of one strength upon the next; and 2) an intricate interaction between biological need or impulse, the developing self, and

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<sup>3</sup>Browning's general theory here is that psychology, narrowly conceived as a science that charts material causes and consequences of human actions and feelings, easily becomes inflated into a broadly conceived quasi-religious project which shapes culture. For an examination of this phenomenon in the death and dying literature, see Miller-McLemore (1988)

a responsive social context. The virtue of care and the idea of generativity then is at once the second to last stage in the "eight ages of man" and the ethical axis of the cycle of generations as a whole.

Erikson shows that moral choices lie embedded in "a synthesis of psychosexual, psychosocial, and cognitive stages" that build upon and extend biological or epigenetic potentials (1964b:161). Each life cycle crisis involves some element of moral development; each raises a moral as well as psychological choice in which some actions are better than others. Conversely, real moral dilemmas trigger growth; a person facing the question of abortion or in vitro fertilization faces the possibility of movement to a new stage of emotional, moral, and even spiritual development or of regression. Development and moral decision-making go hand in hand; one cannot and ought not consider one without the other. To do so ignores the fullness of persons involved.

In Erikson's life cycle schema questions of reproduction arise somewhere between the adolescent conflict of identity and identity confusion and the early and later adult conflicts of intimacy and isolation and generativity and stagnation. As a life cycle stage, generativity represents the fruition of six previous crises. It makes sense then to suppose that a person would have greater difficulty resolving some of the dilemmas of infertility or fertility if he or she had little or no support from the surrounding social milieu and the ideologies of society or had failed to resolve previous life cycle issues satisfactorily—especially matters of identity and intimacy.

On both accounts, modern society stands at a troubling turning point. We no longer know what it means to be a woman or a man. Feminist criticism rests squarely on disrupting conventional images of women's lives and challenging traditional roles of wife, mother, and housewife. We tend to overlook the revolutionary transformations in common life that have occurred in the past two decades with the rearrangement of relations between the sexes. Old ways of relating and becoming a mature self as defined in patriarchal society have lost their hold on the popular mentality. Even Phyllis Schlafly, who extols housewifery as the only virtuous role for women, adopts roles in "real life" as a lawyer and political activist that would not have been open to her a few decades ago. She is not alone in her inability to resolve much less admit the contradiction that she lives. New ways of understanding the self that move beyond restricting patriarchal definitions of parenthood and adulthood have only begun to take shape (cf. Miller-McLemore 1991b).

Hence, modern women and men who face questions of reproduction

have not likely resolved identity issues or matters of intimacy, much less questions of generativity. At the same time that science offers revolutionary means to control reproductive capacities, the dominating images of white, middle-class culture—of being a woman, wife, and mother—have come under severe attack and childbearing as the chief aim and moral duty of women is particularly suspect. The institution of motherhood itself lies before us for reconsideration. We must ask what seemed obvious before: Why do we want to become mothers? Why do we want children in the first place?

But even if having children is a socially-imposed and limiting ideal of fulfillment for women, as many feminists rightly argue, this does not preclude the potential significance of bearing and nurturing a child for self-development or for enhancement of society. Indeed, as Erikson indicates, generativity builds upon and enhances identity development for both men and women (1982:67). A person's self-concept can shift dramatically during this time. Robbie Davis-Floyd contends that pregnancy is perhaps the most "overlooked life-crisis rite of passage" in American society, denying persons, especially women, its powerful transformative experience of growth (13, 16, 20). Likewise conception, childbirth, and childrearing bring a fresh commitment to the broader community. Somehow, through a new sort of mutual understanding learned and practiced over and over in the intense moments of attachment with an infant, one who has truly cared for a child gains new empathy for others—parents, other children, one's spouse, the oppressed. T. Berry Brazelton goes so far as to say that for both men and women learning "what that person [the baby] needs to give back to you and what you have to give to get that person to give back to you" has implications not just for individual development but for broader "national values" (Moyers:146-47).

This stage, like others related to a woman's changing sexuality, bears not just critical psychological implications but raises "fundamental religious questions". No change in a woman's life is "more radical" or "raises the question of a woman's self-understanding" in such a dramatic way (Washbourn:2, 94).

Although generativity encompasses not just procreation but the creation of new products and new ideas, problems of infertility present a unique developmental crisis. One can choose not to write a book or not to pursue promotions in a particular career and turn to other creative outlets. But most often infertility comes unbidden, unexpected, and undesired, and carries a particular poignant sense of inner failure and inadequacy—physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual. Women, Chris-

tine Crowe observes, experience their infertility as a challenge to their womanhood. Yet using in vitro fertilization to become "real" women has its cost: intense anxiety, depression, obsession with reproduction, and so forth. Where such generation fails, "stagnation"—to use Erikson's word—and regression to previous stages result. So important is generativity, he asserts, that its denial has as severe repercussions as the "denial of sexuality"—it is "as severe a source of inner tension" (1964b:132). Being deprived of the moral practice of attachment to an infant, Brazelton says, leaves women and men with "an unfulfilled longing," "an unconscious anger," and a driven need to acquire, "compete, win, be first" (Moyers:146-47). While persons take sexual frustration seriously, they tend to overlook the pathology caused by "*generative frustration*" (Erikson 1982:68).

At this point Erikson fails to discern a further dimension of this tension. He contends that adults have less concern for death than children or the elderly—"a supremely sanctioned disregard of death," as he puts it, due to their extreme business "taking care of actual births." To the contrary, I argue that generating adults intuit the "shadow of nonbeing" in every act of creativity, whether verbalized or not (1982:80; cf. Miller-McLemore 1988). To wish to generate, whether children, works of art, or empires, indirectly acknowledges the presence of finitude and its fulfillment appeases death's threat to life; the failure to produce comes as death, whether literally with the cramping flow of menstrual blood that tells the woman in an instant that a potential life has died or figuratively in the depression of repeated failures to conceive. Although Washbourn overlooks the range of problems related to failed pregnancies and infertility, she agrees that the theme of death fills the daily contemplations of a woman during pregnancy. Preparing for and then giving birth itself comes "as close to dying as any other human experience" (97-98).

Others have talked about this in a positive, theoretical vein. Hauerwas describes children as a "sign that hope is stronger than despair" (while carefully avoiding the "sinful pretension" that children insure our immortality) (1986:144, 147). Robert Lifton even believes that the threat of death 'intensified by the fear of nuclear holocaust' and the desire for continuity of life have replaced both Freud's sexual neuroses and Erikson's identity conflict as "the major source of our psychological impairments" (1976:81; 1973:93-94). Hence, the human longing for immortality is more than just denial of death; it represents an innate universal urge to maintain a sense of connectedness to life. He recommends a variety of "modes," one of which includes biological

propagation, as necessary recourse to meet the need. Leon Kass argues that the need cannot and should not be met through technologies designed to retard aging. These only exhaust life's zest. Rather, satisfaction of the desire for immortality comes through new life, that is, through perpetuation and regeneration (1985:299-317). Hans Jonas notes, "It is the young that ever renew and thus keep alive the sense of wonder, of relevance, of the unconditional, of ultimate commitment, which (let us be frank) goes to sleep in us as we grow older and tired" (1968:27-39; cf. Kass 1974:75).

But none of these men has explored in any depth the flip side of these speculations or what these speculations mean for women in particular. If, as Erikson argues, only those who have "taken care of things and people" (1963:268) can bear the fruit of integrity and wisdom in life's later stage of old age, persons who cannot conceive, for whatever reason, must find other ways to affirm themselves and their place in the life cycle. They must find ways to justify life and answer questions of its meaning and worth.

Notably the flip side has been addressed primarily by medical science. People look to science for technical, physical answers. And the realm of reproductive engineering, pushing ahead so rapidly that it is virtually impossible to remain up to date, happily provides and even imposes not just immediate answers but new images of human fulfillment. Kass criticizes age-slowness technologies but neglects the extent to which technologies designed to generate life also exhaust its zest. Where women once recognized the limitedness of human life within even the monthly modulations of their bodies, now science tempts toward endless conquest. Some infertile women feel new pressures "to keep on trying until they have exhausted every possible treatment" (Warren:45). "Restless technology," as Jonas calls it, lures us forever onward with its promise of unlimited possibilities—a "wholly unprecedented belief in virtual 'infinity'" (1979:36-37).

Yet infertility is not simply a problem of the soma, as these discussions in medical research and even medical ethics would lead us to believe (cf. Solomon:41-49). Moreover, although the immediate impact of infertility is personal, it carries broader social and religious implications. Generative frustration gets submerged in "the dominant technological ethos of birth control," argues Erikson (1982:68), and, I would add, more recently in the inverse ethos of conceptive technologies. Rather than invent further technologies, he recommends an alternative route. In place of the arduous pursuit of generativity through all sorts of new mechanical means, persons ought to consider "a more *universal care*

concerned with a qualitative improvement" for every child born (1982:68). In this statement, he pushes us to both limit and broaden our horizons of the meaning of generativity. Simply stated, "man" must learn "to restrain his capacity for unlimited propagation, invention and expansion"; parental responsibilities extend far beyond producing biological offspring. He calls us to universal "generative responsibility toward all human beings," not only through "contraceptives and food packages" but through a "guarantee to each child [of the] chance" for full development (1964b:131-32).

Despite the idealistic nature of Erikson's vision here, we cannot ignore the need for a broader interpretation of generativity. Nor can we ignore the drain imposed by the intense, and sometimes self-centered, efforts to procure children upon personal and general social energies. How much of the researcher's and physician's interest, for instance, lies in narrow concerns about career advancement and personal profit in this rapidly expanding field of research? Why have we focused, ask Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden, editors of *Test-Tube Women*, so exclusively on "female biology as the only path to mothering"? Considering the increasing "feminization of poverty," why haven't we given more attention to "the children already among us, the women who are mothers *now*?" (3-4).<sup>4</sup> Hauerwas calls the motivation behind NRTs "unjust": the resources spent are not "worth the results." Amidst the many competing needs of society, others merit the attention given men who want children "biologically" their own and the "small percentage of women" who wish "to experience pregnancy." Other needs merit the energies of researchers drawn by "the attraction of an 'interesting problem'" (1986:153-54).

## A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF MALE-DEFINED GENERATIVITY: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

In the concept of generativity, Erikson and Browning have proposed a significant moral ideal and model of maturity. But as the discussion thus far suggests, the term and the ideal itself are ripe for misappropriation. Neither Browning nor Erikson understood its full implications or

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<sup>4</sup>A recent *Bulletin of the Park Ridge Center* (May 1989) cites a report issued by the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions that documents the extent to which we have increasingly neglected the children already among us: uninsured children increased 13% in the past five years, in the last decade, Medicaid served 400,000 fewer children, seven million do not receive routine medical care, deaths from abuse and AIDS are on the rise (17-18). See also Edelman

foresaw how the concept might be misconstrued when interpreted only from the perspective of men. In their onesided attention to masculine experience as normative, Erikson and Browning only tell part of the story. It is not surprising that in his first book on Erikson, Browning initially names Erikson's normative ideal "generative *man*." Although partly a technical blunder that now has Browning apologizing for his exclusive language, it remains a slip subtly revealing the predominant orientation of Erikson's ideal and Browning's study—man.

Erikson himself had to contend with the misogynous sentiment inherent in the psychoanalytic tradition. Despite his sympathies for certain feminine qualities, how could he avoid Freud's biases? A man of his times, Freud rationalized oppressive patriarchal social structures as inherent flaws in female biological nature. Because he conflated the generic with the masculine, he "took the woman's lack of a penis literally as an ontological defect" (Ruether:137). Thus women's major development necessarily involves a frustrated quest to receive from males, whether father, husband, or son, what they lack by nature. The best women can hope for is only a fixated stage in "normal" (i.e., male) development: passive acceptance of biological fate and even masochistic, narcissistic resignation to a secondary and dependent destiny as vessels of male activity and vicarious appendages of male offspring. This reading of women's development interprets the heightened technological efforts to have a baby as one further extension of the wish for a penis.<sup>5</sup>

Erikson can hardly help but perpetuate a similar sexist sociocultural consensus as biological and psychological fact. With only a slight change of phrase, he remarks that a woman's fulfillment rests upon filling her "inner space" with offspring of "chosen men." But he does add to this assessment an intriguing second element that opens his theory up to possible nonsexist reappropriations, in part because it pertains not only to women but to human society at large: a woman's fulfillment also depends upon "a biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" (Erikson 1964a, cited by Weisstein:133). Despite the parallels with Freud in the former phrase, the latter—the "biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy"—represents for Erikson not a duty placed upon women

<sup>5</sup>Granted, early on persons within the field of psychology, like Helene Deutsch, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and others (cf Strouse) challenged these orthodox Freudian notions. They acknowledged the existential framework of penis envy as envy of *social* (not ontological) domination. Still such appeals did little to alter the bias that lies at the roots of modern psychology.

alone but an essential and highly-prized virtue for all human beings. For him, generativity defines adult maturity for women *and* men.

Nonetheless, despite Erikson's intentions, several problems remain. These have serious implications for the realm of reproductive technologies. The male-dominated psychological and moral theory that has followed upon both Freud and Erikson construes generativity largely in terms of *producing*. Browning tempers this somewhat by emphasizing that generativity ultimately means a *taking care of* what (although not particularly who) one has produced and by demonstrating that this virtue is implicitly central at every stage of development (1975). And Erikson insists that although generativity includes "*procreativity, productivity, and creativity*," (1982:67) these popular synonyms cannot and should not replace it (1963:267; 1968:138). He intends the term broadly as a metaphor for an adulthood centered on relationships and nurture, not simply as another term for career advancement.

But the appropriation of the ideal in the lives of modern white, middle-class American men demonstrates just such a progressive restriction. Daniel Levinson's empirical survey of the patterns of male growth based upon biographical interviews of forty men ages 17 to 47 demonstrates that men pursue generating at the expense of preserving. While relying on Erikson's life cycle theory, Levinson reveals a dramatic contradiction between Erikson's and Browning's abstract theories and the actual lives of men. His study captures an essential feature of the patterns of male development: in our society as early as age 17 the products of "a man's work" are *the* singular "vehicle for the fulfillment or negation of central aspects of the self" (9). Adulthood means "generativity," but now understood largely in a technical, product-oriented sense. Most men pass through Erikson's phase of generativity placing its foci in the sphere of work, not in commitments to others—whether friends, colleagues, wife, or children. The wife is "the true mentor" because she devotedly "creates a 'boundary space' within which his aspirations can be imagined and his hopes nourished" (109). That a man might learn to create comparable "space" for a woman's or a child's dreams does not appear an essential aspect of development in the lives of the men studied. Bill Moyers is not alone when he confesses in his interview with Brazelton that while he was on the road during his eldest son's first year, the six month old thought "David Brinkley was his father" (146). Most men miss learning the virtues gained through the moral practice of attachment to an infant (see also Vaillant; Halper; Dittes; Ehrenrich).

Not surprisingly, given this limited reading of generativity centered on obtaining and owning products, the men in Levinson's investigation

often experience a midlife crisis. Although he does not draw this conclusion, I would contend that the crisis as he depicts it has relevance primarily for men and results directly from an implicit cultural and religious value that pushes them to ignore generative activity throughout life and focus instead upon acquisitions of vocational success. At forty—an age that seems long delayed in light of women's development—only a kind of "crisis" may force men to recognize the importance of various attachments, whether wife, children or others, previously regarded as secondary. Others are not "products" and do not exist solely for the promotion of their own dream. Generativity in a fuller sense may become a possibility.

But how possible? Levinson, Erikson, and Browning all assume that the virtue of care of what or whom one has generated cannot emerge fully until later in adulthood. Even if it were true that authentic generativity must await the forties, they fail to account for just how such a capacity to produce, care, *and* nurture can grow out of a series of stages that clearly prioritize other divergent values—self-assertion, independence, and even a necessary overt disregard for what or whom one has created. If "only the initial stage of trust versus mistrust suggests the type of mutuality that Erikson means by intimacy and generativity" (Gilligan:12), how can intimacy or generativity even emerge in adulthood? All the stages in between promote separateness and, as in Levinson's study, have "individuation" as their ultimate goal. Browning does emphasize the way each stage contributes indirectly to the virtue of care and generativity (1975:181-97). But neither Browning or Erikson makes entirely clear how generativity is actually woven into a childhood centered on autonomy and will, initiative and purpose, industry and competence.

The midlife shifts that Levinson reports—in what and whom to care for and how to care—come too little, too late with too many restrictions. I question whether men can truly achieve such a dramatic alteration in their fundamental priorities at this point and reconcile the values for care with the deepseated status given to "Becoming One's Own Man." How can they relinquish ingrained patterns of climbing to "the top rung" of the ladder (Levinson:60)? How can one change such a basic religious orientation to life and begin to develop in mid-life moral attributes of generativity? Even if some do realize significant values of care and connection at this later point, this still symbolizes more a failure or loss of "success" as patriarchal society has defined it than a redefinition of the meaning of the term itself.

## GENERATIVE WOMAN AND REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

We cannot fairly adjudicate the concerns of NRTs without addressing this skewed pattern of generativity. Where the theories and practices of white, male society have relegated the important virtue of generativity to life's later stages, many women experience an earlier psychological emphasis on caring for others, and many develop an ethic of connectedness and mutuality as their reproductive capacity matures well before their forties. Where society has reduced the meaning of generativity to images of quantitative productivity, many women, often to their economic and emotional detriment, continue to enact a generativity that stresses *caring for* other human beings over simply *creating* new products.

Questions of reproduction represent a critical existential moment in moral and religious development. They represent moments when persons rethink their participation in the activity of generativity. Women in particular do not and cannot await, as the men in Levinson's study, some "midlife" crisis in later adulthood to consolidate their thoughts on generativity. And with NRTs, the possibility of choice enters where before necessity prevailed and a passive, reticent sexuality bound women in dependence. Now women have begun to think about what they want and to assert answers.

But to do so, notes Carol Gilligan, brings a sharp clash between traditional definitions of femininity and definitions of adulthood. Women considering reproduction by whatever means face a moral question that has been problematic for women and has continued to complicate the course of their development—the conflict between the ideal of selflessness and the place of responsibility and choice (132). Whereas "the 'good woman' masks assertion in evasion, denying responsibility by claiming only to meet the needs of others," and gives most visibly to others by having and caring for children, the hallmark of adulthood has been portrayed as the capacity for autonomous thinking and independent action (70). To be both morally good and yet responsible as an adult seem diametrically opposed. The traits of a "good" woman—the equation of goodness with self-sacrifice— and the traits of a "mature" person—the exercise of adult choice and participation—seem to contradict each other.

Women faced with reproductive decisions, not to mention society at large, must recognize and reconcile these competing images. Many women find themselves caught developmentally between two modes of moral reasoning—a stage in which considering one's own needs and desires is equated with selfishness and a stage that resolves the conflicts

this creates by the realization that acting responsibly toward oneself and one's needs will sustain connections with others rather than impede them. Those who reach the latter stage find the dilemmas of reproduction an opportunity to realize, perhaps for the first time, that responsiveness to others and to oneself are not mutually exclusive.

To consider caring for a baby or to choose between carrying or aborting a fetus within one's own body forces a woman to differentiate and consider how she cares for herself. When the announcement of a pregnancy or the physical growth itself makes clear her obvious engagement in sexual activity, she can no longer hide behind a screen of disregard for herself that denies her own participation and needs. The imperative becomes "to act responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection" (Gilligan:149). The concept of goodness expands to encompass respect for one's own needs and one's moral agency. Moreover, when reproduction occurs through overt medical intervention, women can no longer presume that it is something done unto them, despite society's own considerable ambivalence about expressions of female sexuality and adulthood.

In the case of NRTs, recognition of the woman as a person with rights and choices—that it is legitimate to consider the interests of the self and that each self must claim a certain measure of moral agency—can bring about a monumental moral and religious transformation. Whereas a significant personal relationship may move men to higher levels of development that include more generative concerns, for women the critical experience is not intimacy but choice (Gilligan:149, 164). The concept of rights and justice allows women to see themselves as stronger and to consider their interests as legitimate. Ignoring a woman's felt experience or making the needs of a fetus or infant of higher significance than hers has dire repercussions for her own moral and religious sense of self. On the flip side, recognition of the man as a person with a need to engage in the moral practice of birth, attachment, and intimacy may initiate transformations for them and for society at large.

But men have tended to ignore critical aspects of generativity related to infants and children. As a result, they often bypass the ways in which questions of reproduction can herald moral growth. As Levinson's study confirms, men produce and women take care. We must wonder then how well men who have postponed attention to the virtue of care and the practice of generativity and who participate in NRTs in whatever fashion (whether researcher or spouse) can truly empathize with the developmental generative anxieties of women. Some feminists have

interpreted the institutionalization of reproductive research, developed and applied primarily by male physicians, researchers, and businessmen, as simply one more oppressive step in the use and abuse of women (cf. Holmes, Hoskins, and Gross 1981a, 1981b; Arditti, Klein, and Minden; Corea, et al. 1987; Stanworth 1987b; Spallone and Steinberg; Klein).

Part of the desire of men to have their own biological offspring would seem to arise more from the need to make and acquire a production uniquely one's own that enhances one's sense of achievement than from a need to create, take care of, and enter into deep connections with the gift of new life. In a society so heavily committed to high productivity, the idea of caring for the "production" can drop out completely. In the case of Baby M, in which the Sorkow decision upheld the validity of surrogate contracts and awarded custody to the sperm donor, Bill Stern, it is Betsy, his wife, who will stay home and take care of the child (Raymond:68). It is women who bear an inordinate degree of responsibility for "maintaining and regenerating" the cycle of generations. The tasks of generativity remain unevenly divided, granting men the power to produce and entitlement to products but leaving women with the demanding responsibility of caring for what or whom is produced (cf. Boulton).

Not surprisingly, given this context, evaluations of NRTs have tended to focus upon the "product of pregnancy and childbirth (the foetus, the infant) over the mother herself" (Stanworth:26-27).<sup>6</sup> Even the names "test-tube babies," "artificial insemination," and "surrogate mother" diminish the real work required of women: babies may begin in test-tube but the time spent there remains insignificant compared to the womb; the only *artificial* aspect of insemination is the restriction of the man's participation, not the woman's; surrogacy still involves heavy burdens upon the woman (Stanworth:13,26). In all three cases, apart from relatively minor laboratory manipulations, the demands upon the woman's body, psyche, and spirit of bearing a fetus and conceiving a baby still occur, not to mention the months of breastfeeding and days of toilet training to follow. How many men fret over the latter?

No doubt public policies might receive a different hearing if men did. So far we have avoided the troubling questions of the requisite

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<sup>6</sup>Note how easily the woman carrying the child gets ignored in recent court-ordered obstetrical interventions. In the case of Angela Carder, a 28-year-old woman 26 weeks pregnant and dying of cancer in June of 1987, the product—the baby—becomes central. Contrary to the wishes of husband, parents, obstetrician, and her attorney and in the midst of Angela's own ambivalence, the court ordered delivery of the baby by caesarean section. The baby died two hours later, Angela, two days later (*Chicago Tribune* 1f).

social structures, rituals, and institutions necessary to make genuine generativity for men and women a realizable possibility. In his reflections on generativity, Browning does express concern that modern society, so busy in its technological generation of products, has lost the rudimentary means to conserve, preserve, maintain, and generally take care of itself and the highly advanced technological creations that it continues to generate. Erikson, he believes, identifies the "problem of modern man" as "his *nongenerative mentality*—his inability to care for what *he* creates." "Man" remains nongenerative "in the way *he* treats *his* children, builds *his* buildings, conducts *his* science, experiments with *his* technology, and ravishes *his* environment" (1975:164, emphasis added). Here I believe it important to retain the masculine pronoun. Browning, however, fails to perceive the masculine, patriarchal roots and overtones of the problem.

Social structures that reward those who produce and penalize those who take care preclude full actualization of generativity for both men and women. How can generativity emerge in a society that does not respect the high demands of time and energy needed to bear and raise children? Indeed women stand at risk in a society that does not reward affiliations and generativity in its broader meaning but instead sanctions separation and material achievements. Over and over, society communicates its disregard for caretaking roles, whether mother or nurse, mental health and nursing home aid, school teacher, daycare worker. By comparison with other jobs and considering the value of their work, these caregivers receive less monetary reward, security, or status; local and state government and employers continue to ignore the need for adequate childcare; criteria for promotion seldom build in, much less honor, time needed for attending to one's family and children.

In the focus on performance and results, society risks equating the birth and rearing of a child with product-oriented manufacturing, a metaphor which will never do (cf. May 1988:132-40). Indeed, hasn't the "climbing the ladder" motif already crept into the fascination with NRTs, subtly transferring to motherhood the sense that all women can or should perform the achievement of having a child and acquire a product of their own? This restricted definition of generativity implies that one owns what one produces. Yet we never own our children. Children come to us as gifts; in their case, not even biology can determine ownership. Current discussions about NRTs may mislead persons into believing otherwise.

This whole discussion takes on immediate pertinence as the question of abortion returns to public forum. Many justifiably assert, as does

Richard McCormick, the “claims of nascent life upon us.” But they assert these claims without authentic regard for the more complicated but equally valid claims of the lives of children and mature adults. That is, persons believe that they can abstract the moral debate about the life of a fetus from troubling questions of caring for the child once born (cf. McCormick 1989:45, 1990; Miller-McLemore 1990).

At the present moment, mothers bear the major onus and responsibility for the actual life of a child before and after birth. And in the last several decades the range of this responsibility has expanded from physical provisions to emotional, social, and intellectual development. We live with the dangers of what sociologists Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto have named the “myth of maternal omnipotence”—the assumption that the mother bears all blame or credit for the welfare of a child’s whole life and self (71). Fathers do not typically share this burden, except perhaps financially, and in the case of many abortions, financial support would not have been forthcoming. Women know the weight they bear and the blood they shed. In a real sense men don’t. They don’t experience the “claims of nascent life” or the claims of the lives of young children or aging adults. In sheer quantitative measures, women do. The headline of a recent report released by ten Chicago-area chapters of the Older Women’s League reads, “Average woman spends 35 years caring for family,” including care for aging parents. Despite some of the changes in women’s roles in the past few decades, women still carry the major load of domestic tasks, putting in longer working hours at work and home than their grandmothers ever did, and “making huge sacrifices to sustain family life” (Andolsen:5).

We must ask ourselves how much longer women can do so. As we look at the lively reproductive debate, we cannot wait passively, as Gilligan advises, for men to “catch up” in their moral development and correct the “potential indifference of a morality” of logic and a “conception of justice blinded” to critical aspects of care (100). Not without serious repercussions. We must attend to the development of the capacity to care in both men and women long before midlife and learn to respect and nurture the seeds of generativity and its virtues in both. Generativity must no longer be understood in a singular, separatist sense—divorced from connections to self, others, and world. We must begin to value, Gilligan herself says, “the importance *throughout life* of the connection between self and other,” and I would add, for men as well as for women (98, emphasis added). For an ethic of care and generativity to await the second to last age in life is simply too late. Growth in morality for men as well as women means an awareness of the web of interconnection at

all stages and an increasing ability over time to form and negotiate ever more sophisticated relationships. The fruition of generativity and care does not appear suddenly out of a vacuum but belongs to a long and steady process of conflict and concern about mutuality.

Restricted interpretations of generativity for both men and women have emerged out of a cultural context characterized by ambivalence about connection and care. The idealization of separation results from a fear of merger and self-dispersion that has roots deep in the history of Western civilization and sexism (Keller:2). It is this fear of the maternal and feminine web and the chaotic interconnections that women embody that motivates an insistence on the ideal of a purely separate, monolithic ego and, by extension, the insistence on a limited public ideal of a generativity that eventuates in a quasi-generative self accumulating products from a safe distance.

This may not explain exhaustively the roots of distorted theories and enactments of generativity. But it does position the conversation within a broader cultural context. It may also account for the social forces that relativize the woman's procreative role, whether through philosophical theory as with Aristotle, through technologies that place control in the hands of men, or through ethical discussions that eclipse the pregnant woman's experience. It may help to remember that we can hardly approach questions of reproduction without stirring up core sentiments of anger toward women and attachment. Even as we reappropriate values and rights of women, women themselves continue to struggle with their own ingrained antipathy toward themselves and their entanglement in the sticky webs of generativity.

Yet the metaphors of generativity and parenting, both literally and beyond their literal embodiment, have immense possibilities. As Ruddick contends, "'maternal' is a social category. Although maternal thinking arises out of actual child-caring practices, biological parenting is neither necessary nor sufficient. Women's ways of understanding generativity and guiding the next generation have applicability in many other 'kinds of working and caring for others'" (1983:225; cf. Ruddick 1989). Our world desperately needs persons familiar with this art, not simply biologically but in all activities. Understanding children, respecting their boundaries, helping them grow are moral tasks worthy of recapitulation beyond the narrow confines of the mother-child dyad (Glaz 1987, 1990).

Through long hours of arduous practice mothers acquire an entire moral and metaphysical discipline of thought to assure the "preservation, growth, and acceptability" of their children (Ruddick 1983:214-

16). Genuine care of a small being demands finely tuned attitudes and virtues of "holding," "humility," "resilient cheerfulness," "good humor," and ultimately the capacity for what she calls "attentive love." The exercise of "keeping over acquiring, of conserving the fragile, of maintaining whatever is at hand and necessary to the child's life," of loving "without seizing or using"—all this requires deep reserves of energy and extended periods of patient waiting (Ruddick 1983:217, 223-24). It may be that parenting is the "ascetic opportunity *par excellence*," as Elizabeth Dreyer suggests. Similar to, but distinct from, strict rituals of religious in seclusion, a parent encounters unexpected opportunities to practice a religiosity that lies at the heart of asceticism: "A full night's sleep, time to oneself, the freedom to come and go as one pleases—all this must be given up . . . . Huge chunks of life are laid down at the behest of infants. And then, later, parents must let go" (14). To excuse men from this regime or to deprive them of "maternal practice is to encourage them to separate public action from private affection, the privilege of parenthood from its cares" and, I would add, its hidden rewards (Ruddick 1983:225-27).

The separation of caring for infants and children from other means of becoming a generative self and, inversely, the confinement of caregiving to the private sphere of women and home has damaging implications for all parties.<sup>7</sup> It endangers the fullness of women's selfhood, and inversely, it perverts the atmosphere and values of the public arena (cf. Parks). Recent years have revealed the hidden violence in both worlds that this separation perpetuates—abuse in one domain, fierce unrelenting competition in the other. Germaine Greer comments, "childbearing was never intended by biology as a compensation for neglecting all other forms of fulfillment and achievement" (104). Nor were men in the public work world intended to neglect the lessons of human relationality. L. Shannon Jung argues that "only the recognition and recovery by both sexes of the qualities which have been unnaturally split asunder will be sufficient" (59; cf. Griscom:85-98). The debate about new reproductive technologies, matters heretofore perceived as strictly "private," has simply forced us to acknowledge the artificiality of this divorce between public and private. Women move between these spheres by sheer virtue of their childbearing ability and their increasing visibility and involve-

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<sup>7</sup>This public/private distinction may have relevance "only for the white middle and upper classes." Aida Hurtado argues that "historically the American state has intervened constantly in the private lives and domestic arrangements of the working class. Women of Color have not had the benefit of the economic conditions that underlie the public/private distinction" (849).

ment in the workplace and public forum (cf. Martin; Young:25-26).<sup>8</sup> While the dominant American ideology of women's bodies and reproduction tries to keep the realms of home and work separate, this has proven more and more difficult and troublesome.

This returns the discussion to an initial thesis: however far we might come in revisioning generativity, the actual mechanics of abortion and reproductive technologies should never become the singular focus of our ethical discussions. Religious analysis and critique have a vital role. Choosing to *produce* or not to produce a child, by whatever means, remains only *one* critical aspect of the much larger moral and religious task of care and generativity. The whole conversation about reproductive technologies fails us sorely when it confines itself to this, "only a small part of the experience of motherhood" (Stanworth:14; cf. Warren:37, 48-54).

The debate over NRTs reflects the dire need for reconsideration of gender roles in generative functions. We must reorient the discussion of NRTs to better reflect women's understandings and to correct masculine misappropriations. As Margaret Farley puts it, "reproductive technologies that divorce decisions for childbearing from childrearing fail to take seriously the basic needs of children for not only material resources but personal relation and support" (181). Such conversation also fails the woman who births and rears acceptable citizens. In Harrison's words, "Only those who are deeply realistic about what it takes to nourish human life *from birth onward* have the wisdom to evaluate procreative choice" (1983:173).

If we agree that "having children is not just a natural event, but rather one of the most highly charged moral events of our lives" (Hauerwas 1977:633), then moral theologians have some serious rethinking to do about how we understand this activity and in turn, about how we define adulthood and fulfillment for men and for women. What we believe implicitly and explicitly about maturity and womanhood has as much influence on the final outcome as the current focus in medical ethics on "doing the right thing" (cf. Lebacqz 1987).<sup>9</sup> In this

<sup>8</sup>Delivering an earlier form of this paper at the American Academy of Religion when I was seven months pregnant forced this issue. In participating in a session on reproductive rights, I crossed a threshold of sacred space and upset traditional dualisms of private and public voice and objective and subjective knowledge (see Miller-McLemore 1992)

<sup>9</sup>At a women's conference on reproductive technologies Lebacqz observes that "questions about what is right and wrong to *do* were ignored in favor of questions about the nature of the social structures and mythologies that support these technologies"—who holds the power and what is the impact on women's lives (1987 66)

conversation, theological reflection has much at stake and much to contribute. Certainly before we can respond adequately to the decisions that revolve around women's bodies, we must articulate a more comprehensive normative image of development and an ethic that includes the experience of women and their appreciation for a more expansive definition of generativity. This may not resolve the pragmatic dilemmas of the new technologies but it will at least allow us to consider the possibilities in a moral and religious context more sensitive to women.

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