

## Artificial Reproductive Techniques and Their Implications for the Family

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### ABSTRACT:

Artificial reproductive technology represents a significant advancement in the fields of medicine and biology, enabling researchers to fulfill the dreams of many families unable to conceive naturally. This has led them to resort to these technologies in hopes of having a child to fulfill their desires. However, this technology is not without its risks and ethical dilemmas at various levels, particularly concerning the moral implications on the fundamental unit of society, the family. This paper aims to explore some of the ethical repercussions that artificial reproductive technology has on families.

### Keywords:

Technology, Artificial Reproduction; Surrogate Motherhood; Biological Father; Artificial Womb.

### Introduction:

Today's scientific progress in medicine and biology is closely linked with technology that allows control over the human body, making it easy to program or alter it. With the ability to transform it into mere numbers and variables processed by computers and software, this advancement has introduced radical changes to traditional treatment methods.

This has widened the digital divide, becoming a significant measure for classifying countries based on medical advancement. However, this progress has ethical, legal, religious, political, and social implications. This paper discusses these implications on the family, as it is the fundamental unit of society and the preservation of its continuity, as J.F. Mattei states, "The family remains the first cell that establishes our societies, where the child discovers his social dimensions and values of exchange and dialogue."<sup>1</sup>

This leads us to question the various dimensions and implications these developments have on relationships within family members and how these advancements, especially artificial reproductive technology, have altered many traditional concepts foundational to any family, such as parenthood, childbirth, love, and responsibility.

To address this complex issue, we must consider the concepts that constitute this problem and compare them with recent advancements in medicine and biology.

### First: The Family between Social Structure and Biological Relationship

The family fundamentally originates from a biological relationship, or in other words, a group of individuals living in a specific period and bound by certain kinship or lineage. More specifically, it consists of a father, a mother, and children if there is procreation.<sup>2</sup>

Non-procreative bilateral relationships usually fall outside the definition of a family, which is the small institution upon which society stands. Despite the evolution of relationships and social structures, the same biological connection binds its members.

However, significant advancements in medicine and biology, particularly what is known today as artificial reproductive technology, have transformed the family into a new and different form from the traditional relationships among its members.

The old concept was clear, primarily based on two parties: the father and the mother, each responsible for their children's material and moral welfare<sup>3</sup>, a joint responsibility stemming from their initial relationship.

Kant might have expressed this by saying, "Every natural relationship between a man and a woman, resulting from it, a duty of protection and care directed towards the children," and any changes or disturbances to this concept

lead to societal instability, as the family is the natural means of childbearing, and a balanced social structure fundamentally relies on a balanced family structure.

However, the family's entry into these various technological transformations has left a void resulting from the separation between love and reproduction, either at the level of motherhood, fatherhood, or both, raising ethical, psychological, social, and legal dilemmas, all converging towards defining the child's roots, meaning his lineage, or in other words, determining which mothers and which fathers are.

Although anthropology emphasizes the need to define the basic rules for individuals' belonging within a specific social group based on the principle of lineage, today we may no longer know on what basis it can be determined, whether according to the biological factor or otherwise, according to the social factor.

Moreover, artificial reproductive technology has enabled childbirth for many women, including single, virgin, widowed, elderly, and homosexual women, thus freeing this technology from the man while disrupting all traditional lineage rules, as noted by R. Badinet, "If a man needs a woman to have children, perhaps today a woman no longer needs a man."<sup>4</sup>

This has changed many of the biological and social concepts within the family, including the concepts of mother, father, child, and lineage.

### **1. Impacts of Medical Technology Advancements on the Concept of Motherhood:**

Robin Fox states about motherhood, "It is the first of all social relationships,"<sup>5</sup> where the mother is the woman bearing all human emotions, uniquely privileged by nature to carry her offspring within her womb, being the first being in which the individual's life stirs.

However, the ancient concept of motherhood was associated with inferiority, where her role was confined to merely carrying the man's seed without any contribution or intervention from her, or as Joune.M stated, "The mother was considered merely a means to the process of reproduction,"<sup>6</sup> a concept prevalent in Indian and Greek times, where she was considered a place or environment for planting the man's seed to transform into children.

Advancements in science have corrected many of the Middle Ages and ancient errors about the mother, discovering the significant role the mother plays in the reproduction process. Yet, despite these discoveries highlighting the mother's importance in this process, they have introduced other alternatives that could replace the traditional mother, which has ethically reflected on the concept of family. Among these alternatives, we find:

#### **A. The Multiplicity of Motherhood:**

The concept of motherhood has expanded and become divided into several phases: the time of fertilization, pregnancy, and care. Daniel Huet identifies at least two specific times in the context of artificial reproductive technology: the fertilization of the egg and the moment the egg is brought to life.

This represents a pure technical separation between the time of love and the time of reproduction<sup>7</sup>, where the roles of motherhood have diversified, leading to what can be termed "multiplicity of motherhood." This diversification has made it difficult to identify the true mother, resulting in situations where the child has multiple mothers among whom the law must choose.

This indeed occurred in the case of a child named "Stefan" in 1983, where one sister bore a child on behalf of her sibling.<sup>8</sup> In this technique, the mother becomes merely a multifaceted tool, losing all her human dimensions the moment she relinquishes her child to another, essentially losing her right to retain her offspring.

#### **B. The Surrogate Mother:**

This is a mother who rents out her womb without concern for the origin of the fetus implanted within her. Her pregnancy's sole purpose is to nurture this fetus for a specified period under a contract that includes the "product" (the child) and the service of pregnancy, with a fee paid by an intermediary. This commercializes motherhood into a transaction governed by the law of supply and demand, primarily aimed at financial gain, often fetching high prices.

### **C. The Artificial Mother or Artificial Womb:**

This involves the technology of ectogenesis, which supports the development of human embryos outside the human body, from fertilization to the full development of the fetus, without the need for a mother's body.

This solves the problem of finding a surrogate mother and associated ethical dilemmas. However, what can be expected from children raised within the confines of machinery?

These children are deprived of emotional and biological connections within a family, created whenever desired, potentially leading to various psychological and social issues. Accustomed to emotional detachment, these children may become more akin to machines in their behavior, struggling to adapt within a family setting, possibly becoming uncontrollable and prone to violence.

Thus, the concept of motherhood becomes nebulous in the face of advancements in artificial reproductive technologies, rendering motherhood, as Joune.L says, "merely a technical act that can be controlled."<sup>9</sup>

### **2. Implications of Medical Technological Advancements on the Concept of Fatherhood:**

The term "father" in Latin signifies respect or supreme authority and is used for men and gods alike, carrying a significant religious, social, and symbolic weight. He is seen as possessing all rights and bearing the responsibility for his progeny or children from his own lineage.

However, this concept has become ambiguous with the advancement of medical technologies, especially artificial reproduction, which solved the problem of infertile fathers but also introduced various complex issues for families, particularly concerning the multiplicity within the framework of fatherhood, leaving us unsure of the true identity of the father.

Who is more entitled to fatherhood or the affiliation of the child, the symbolic father or the biological father?

#### **A. The Symbolic Father:**

Technology has led to new forms of fatherhood; the social or legal father, represented by the symbolic father through his physical and moral presence, is considered the real father every mother desires for her child. By recognizing and adopting the child, giving him his name and protection, he provides a sense of emotional and material stability.

However, this does not mean that all problems, especially ethical ones, have been resolved. This relationship is vulnerable to breaking at any moment, where the refusal of one party towards the other could collapse the family structure.

The relationship between the father and child could be severed if divorce or the mother's death occurs, as evidenced by several instances where the symbolic father disclaimed any relation to the child, leading to ethical, legal, social, and psychological dilemmas.

One such incident in Sweden in 1981 saw a Swedish judge ruling that the symbolic father had no obligations towards his ex-wife's son, whom he had previously adopted<sup>10</sup>, thereby emptying the concept of fatherhood of any emotional content and turning it into a fragile relationship susceptible to collapse upon changing circumstances.

#### **B. The Biological Father:**

In artificial reproductive technology, the biological father is the individual who donates his sperm to another woman for the purpose of conception without any natural encounter.

However, he bears no responsibility towards the child as his agreement ends with the donation process. This raises numerous issues because a child, regardless of their attachment to their symbolic father, will naturally seek out their biological father upon learning of their existence, disrupting family stability and threatening the continuity of their communal life.

Many studies confirm that children who accidentally discover they are not the biological offspring of their parents face a pivotal moment in their lives, with some insisting on knowing their biological father and others experiencing psychological and emotional crises.<sup>11</sup>

#### **C. Nobel Banks:**

Nobel Banks are establishments where some men deposit their sperm, either for commercial purposes or due to fears of future illnesses that might affect them. The infertile turn to these banks in hopes of acquiring a child, through the purchase of sperm, priced like any commodity available for sale. This raises ethical and legal issues, as it turns the essence of life into a mere product to be bought and sold.

Moreover, it opens the door for single women, widows, and same-sex couples to have children, leading to a mixing of lineages and the loss of the traditional family concept.

These developments introduce radical changes to the concept of fatherhood, threatening the stability of families that lack a father in the traditional sense at any moment. The advancements also impact the concept of children and their various dimensions, whether biological, psychological, or social.

### **3. The Impact of Medical Technological Advancements on the Concept of the Child:**

The advancement of medical sciences in the field of reproduction has made the child the weakest link in the family-building relationship, despite being the primary reason for the existence of these technologies. Hopes are pinned on the child for the continuation of the family.

If the child is considered a vulnerable being from the moment of its conception—assuming it has no rights before this stage—until it reaches the age of eighteen, reproductive technology views it as an object desired by others, with no say in the matter. The child is either an orphan by a pre-programmed orphanhood, a child programmed according to a specification, or a child without a family if born to a single woman or an elderly woman. In all cases, the child is merely a means.

This approach, which turns the child into a means, deprives the child of its right to live within a complete family framework, essential for its psychological and social development. Anne Fagot-Largeault comments, "Acquiring a child to replace the presence of a deceased father, to keep him alive in the mother's memory, is an irresponsible act."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, inseminating a woman with her deceased husband's sperm or fertilizing a dead wife's egg with her husband's sperm is a stark expression of the transformation of reproductive technology goals into merely a technique for fulfilling desires and whims, which surpasses the right to have a child.

### **4. The Impact of Medical Technological Advancements on the Concept of Lineage:**

Humans are unique in their ability to trace their lineage back through generations and to imbue their familial relations with legal, political, and economic significance.<sup>13</sup> Lineage relationships, typically based on blood ties, followed by emotional and psychological bonds, then legal ones, provide individuals with proof of existence and belonging.

Anthropologist Robin Fox states, "Knowing our history and roots saves us from the unknown, as we were not thrown from the sky without a past or history... We have lineage."<sup>14</sup>

However, this traditional concept of lineage has encountered changes, especially with artificial reproductive technology, where its credibility and significance to the individual and society have been questioned.<sup>15</sup> Child affiliation in this technology is based on legal lineage<sup>16</sup>, by contract, making these relationships fragile and depriving the child of one of its most important rights: to know its origins.

The process is shrouded in secrecy, leaving existential questions posed by the artificially conceived child unanswered, including awkward inquiries about their origins, parents, and lineage.<sup>17</sup>

The secrecy surrounding this technology, by hiding the child's lineage, attempts to sever the child from its identity. Such children, produced in this manner, may be subject to a zoological lineage, akin to relationships in the animal kingdom, distancing the child from its humanity due to the loss of identity.

This leaves the individual ignorant of their roots and history, unable to build their future. Lineage and human identity, created by society, are closely linked; the disappearance of one leads to the loss of the other. Corinne Dupuy questions, "Can the newborns produced from this zoological relationship be considered human beings, or are they merely bodies without identity?"<sup>18</sup>

Every child naturally questions their origins early on and continues to seek answers if not satisfied, as their personality formation relies on childhood experiences and the past shared with their parents. The social structure is based on emotional bonds and blood relations, which generate a set of rights and obligations.

Robin Fox emphasizes, "Emotional and blood relations are the foundation of duty and rights in any society."<sup>19</sup> Concealing these relations and making them secretive hides many prohibited relationships leading to mixed lineages, as highlighted by the author of "Le desiré froid," who mentioned, "Secrecy and strict confidentiality about the donor's identity could lead the family into sin."<sup>20</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The widespread adoption of medical technology without questioning its associated meanings has led societies into a slippery slope filled with dangers, as tampering with the family and social structure can devastate civilizations and overturn the order of things.

The anthropological family and paternal system could be overturned without clear justification. Eli Georges Ganbour expressed, "Such achievements could radically change social and intellectual structures, affecting scientific, religious, ethical, social, psychological, and legal fields."<sup>21</sup>

The Islamic stance varies between rejection and conditional acceptance. For instance, surrogate motherhood is allowed by some in the case where a wife bears a child for her husband's other wife (as seen in a case in Kuwait), but not when an external woman carries for the couple. The Islamic Fiqh Council, in its third conference session in Amman in 1986, issued a decree prohibiting reliance on a third party or volunteer woman.

Reproductive technology has opened vast prospects for human aspirations, yet knowing one's biological origins and roots remains essential, both individually and collectively. Robin Fox summarizes, "The social structure fundamentally depends on the relationship linking us to our ancestors and parents, the original basis for all rights, obligations, emotions, and actions."<sup>22</sup> Any contradiction to this social structure threatens the coherence and stability of individual and family structures, leading to potential disintegration and upheaval.

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