

In vitro fertilization**French scientist makes a stand**

JACQUES Testart, the leading French specialist in human *in vitro* fertilization, has committed "professional suicide". That is how he describes his decision to pull out of the race to develop the technique further, except insofar as it will aid infertile couples. Testart, whose group was responsible for the first French test-tube baby, and has since "midwived" 210 more, is sick of the "bébé spectacle" and worries about future "perversions" of the technique.

According to Testart, within a decade everyone will be demanding test-tube babies because it will be possible to determine the sex of the offspring, and to detect genetic and other abnormalities by dividing the early embryo and growing part of it for genetic sampling and tissue testing. Testart is not against these procedures to reduce genetic and sex-linked diseases, and he is pro-abortion ("it exists, and I have no objection in principle"), but he fears where they may lead: "I agree, but



I'm afraid if we have such techniques we can use them for many things." Eugenics is not far away. "I think it's better to abandon the technique than to take the risk." The *in vitro* technique is beginning to create "new demands and new anxieties" rather than treat medical problems such as infertility, which should be its function.

In a book published this month (*L'oeuf Transparent* Flammarion, Paris, 1986) Testart opens with a quotation from the philosopher Kant: "make sure your maxims are those of which you could accept all the consequences". Ethics must come before research, says Testart. He condemns proposals to create banks of individually tailored spare parts, male pregnancies and human births from an animal womb or vice versa. He also fears the consequences of the possible fertilization of eggs by eggs (allowing homosexual or parthenogenetic births) and human cloning. In an interview, he separated himself and his col-

leagues from all such developments. "My group is no longer in the race for 'firsts'".

Testart last week was disappointed that he had had little reaction to his stand from scientists, and in particular none from the leading countries in the field, Britain, the United States and Australia. "I've had plenty of interest from journalists, sociologists and philosophers, but nothing from scientists" said Testart, "except for support from the leader of one French research group in Montpellier". From the other 8-10 research groups in *in vitro* fertilization in France, he has heard nothing.

His group, he says, is behind him but he admits the future of his laboratory "is a problem". He intends to continue research, but to restrict his work to the freezing of human eggs; to achieving successful fertilizations when the sperm is very poor; to understanding the maturation of the egg; and to anything directed to reducing a couple's infertility rather than creating new needs. But there must surely now be a question-mark over the position of Testart's laboratory in Professor Emile Papiernik's clinic at the Hôpital Antoine

Béclère, where Testart described Papiernik as "ambiguous" about the issues raised. **Robert Walgate**

- Last week the Council of Europe, a body which draws members from parliaments throughout Europe and with considerable influence, though no actual power, adopted a clutch of rules on the use of human embryos which the Council expects individual governments to adopt. They should please Jacques Testart (above). The rules would forbid the creation of human clones the implantation of embryos in the uterus of another species or the reverse; the cross-species fertilization of germ cells; the creation of embryos with the sperm of different individuals; the creation of chimaeric individuals; the bringing to term of an embryo outside the female uterus; the creation of individuals from parents of the same sex; the choice of sex of offspring, except for therapeutic reasons; the creation of identical twins; and any experiment on living embryos to fourteen days at normal temperatures (in other words, excluding time the embryo may spend frozen). The Council would also forbid the extraction of any tissue from an embryo unless beneficial to the embryo itself. □

Scientific collaboration**When the East meets the West**

THE science division of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) last week hosted an international seminar on Soviet science. The idea of the Soviet science symposium was triggered by Lord Carington when he became head of NATO two years ago and who believed that the NATO science division needed to be better informed about science in the Soviet Union.

The seminar covered a wide range of topics from many scientific disciplines. What it revealed, however, was not so much gaps in western knowledge of Soviet science, but some profound differences in how the different academic disciplines view Soviet science effort.

Participants at the seminar were either scientists in the "hard" sciences, scientific administrators responsible for exchange programmes or Soviet analysts. Each group, it soon became clear, perceived Soviet science in different ways. To the analysts, for example, the structure of Soviet scientific institutions, each with its military department, responsible for relaying useful data to military establishments, is a basic datum, but several of the scientists and administrators expressed shock that the exchange programmes they sponsored or took part in could have a covert military dimension. A useful conclusion which was accepted by all groups was that it is somewhat misleading to lump

together "science and technology" in the planning of exchange programmes, although this has now become standard practice in international agreements. For although basic research is aimed at increasing and disseminating scientific knowledge, applied research, being aimed at the production sphere, inevitably involves some commercial secrecy.

The chief barriers to scientific cooperation with the Soviet Union seemed well-known to all participants: the difficulties of bringing a Soviet colleague to an international conference, the lack of available information about which Soviet laboratories are doing significant work in one's own field, or about the *curriculum vitae* of a Soviet scientist proposed for an exchange. On the Soviet side, there were of course the problems of access to western journals and the low standard of Soviet publications because of the lack of a peer review system, and a hierarchical research structure which (at least until Mr Gorbachev's reforms) fostered routine rather than imaginative research.

There was much curiosity about how far the Soviet Union had gone with creating the promised computerized database for the entire academy network and whether or not this will be linked to similar networks in the West, given the Soviet authorities' known emphasis on secrecy.

Vera Rich