

REVIEWS

CIBA SYMPOSIUM, 17. LAW AND ETHICS OF AID AND EMBRYO TRANSFER. Ed. G. E. Wostenholme and D. W. Fitzsimmons. Elsevier, Amsterdam and Ass. Sci. Pub. N.Y. 1973. Pp. 110. No price stated. 3

Spallanzani's success with inseminating dogs led, after long delay to its application to the eugenic improvement of cattle in the U.S.S.R. and as a remedy for male sterility in man in the U.S.A. and U.K. Not that sterility in man has ever been a serious problem in Christian or other human societies: promiscuity before marriage and adultery afterwards have usually sufficed to cover it up or make it good. To be sure these practices have given us pedigrees which could put the geneticist wrong. But the geneticist in his turn has discovered how to put the pedigree right. If 50 per cent of pre-marital babies get the wrong fathers the geneticist is prepared to set the record straight.

It is often said glibly that human breeding has never been, and never can be, experimental. But this opinion contains a fallacy. Rather, as our knowledge and control of genetic processes, and our means of recording them, become more accurate, more diverse in method, and more closely knit between methods, human breeding has been acquiring, step by step, an effectively rigorous experimental character: we have merely to wait for other people to do the experiments for us.

For the geneticist and medical scientist one of the steps by which experimental control can be reinforced is AID. This is one way in which genetics is brought in touch with the methods and ideas of the lawyer and the moralist, the psychologist and the philosopher. There are many other ways but loose thinking or indeed no thinking about heredity generally allows their genetic issues to be put on one side. The social scientist can usually take refuge behind a screen of words. There is the word *identity* which may mean anything but usually means nothing. Or the word *person*. What is a person? It is something with an identity. Is it something defined by *ancestry*? We know it is not. But nearly everyone else thinks it is.

In the present symposium, however, for the first time the various disciplines are brought face to face with one another. And very often with the truth. AID is an innovation in the genetic basis of social relations. The practice, like homosexuality, is exceptional. It breaks the rules. If it were to be the rule it would alter the rules of human evolution itself. Moralists and lawyers do not in general like to provide for the breaking of rules. They simply disapprove and the Royal Commission of 1960, a patrilinear body, disapproved. (As did the Archbishop of Canterbury with eight children and several Popes with none.) But in this discussion the lawyers and moralists, notably Lord Kilbrandon and Canon Dunstan, are willing to waive any patrilinear or other prejudices they may have.

The result is the beginning of an argument which will continue, no doubt, for many generations. It is presented here as an intricate and undigested argument. It has no proper introduction or conclusion. Nor does anyone dare to identify the issues. But they are admitted to be genetic, social and legal. And they can be stated as questions.

First, the genetic questions: is the donor or the recipient of semen to be chosen or taken at random; are they to be registered or pooled by operators; are the operators to be with or without genetic or medical knowledge, with or without eugenic intentions or racial prejudices? The short answer to these questions is that society, the recipient and the husband of the recipient all have an interest in a public control of these proceedings working on explicit principles.

Secondly, what knowledge shall the donor or the mother of the offspring have of one another, or society have of the whole process? Here the analogy of adoption is already before us, and we know that adoption societies strenuously conceal the results of their activities. Since the working classes are largely the donors, and the professional classes the adopters, there is a proportion of "over-placing" and hence of disappointments. The most significant social evidence, genetic and experimental evidence, is thus kept secret and lost. The same may be true of the results of AID. But need it be true?

Thirdly, what obligations shall the operators have to mother or husband, donor or offspring? And, conversely, what claims shall the offspring have against his genetic or legal parents? We now have the possibility that offspring may claim the benefits of inherited property from one parent and the damages for an inherited chromosome from the other; or from the operator.

If, as we expect and as Lord Kilbrandon expects, this practice is with us to stay, its problems, already multifarious, will further multiply. It will then be clear that the issues discussed will need to be put on a broader basis.

Artificial insemination together with contraception and abortion are being carried out on an unprecedented scale together with the diagnosis of abnormalities of sex and of chromosomes before birth; together also with the migration, segregation and integration of peoples after birth. Most of these processes are carried out in disregard of one another. But in their effects they are all bound to be connected. The next step will be to consider them in their connections.

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GENETIC VARIATION IN BRITAIN. Ed. D. F. Roberts and E. Sunderland. Taylor & Francis, London, 1973. Pp. viii + 306. £5.00.

If we are to study variation in a people an island is the best site, but two questions follow: how big an island and how large a people? The answers depend on how many methods of study are to be used. The present symposium uses historical, linguistic, demographic and genetical methods, these last concerning mating patterns, now and in the past; it also uses class structures, racial isolates, and the study of sociological, polygenic and marker differences. If all these are applied to one small community, momentous conclusions would be expected. Unfortunately, however, the effort has been dispersed, the investigators and their evidence are largely disconnected, and the conclusions therefore inconclusive.

The historical comments on Sikhs, Gypsies and Anglo-Saxons are useful. But to describe the Irish as Celtic is like describing Stonehenge as Druidic.