

**Is “Being Born” in the Best Interest of the Child?
- Ideology of Reproduction *versus* Non-Suffering -**

A synthesis of this [book](#)

Should we forbid contraception, abortion, voluntary sterilization, masturbation, sodomy, homosexuality, assisted suicide, euthanasia, reproductive cloning and the use of an artificial womb? Is being born in the best interest of the child and of future generations?

Law-makers answer these questions according to their values and moral standards. In order to form an idea of the answers that might be proposed in the future, we need to get a better understanding of the ways that values and moral standards are established and then evolve. This is the purpose of the following research program.

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The Ideology of reproduction is that social discourse which turns reproduction into a requirement, and the norm for all.

The roots of this ideology could go back to 100,000 years, traces of burial rites show a belief that the spirit outlives the body, a belief that the spirit needs to ensure the procreation of its lineage, a man's descendants would serve his soul after death, providing it with food and enabling it to reach reincarnation.

Lineage then became all-important for human communities, providing a structure whereby men could rest assured that their descendants would serve their spirits after death, **serve our own spirit after our own death.**

This ideology underwent a major evolution in recent human history, in the Neolithic age, less than 10,000 years ago. Alongside the domestication of animals and the invention of husbandry, humans acquired new revolutionary knowledge: we discovered that the male of the species had a part to play in the reproduction process, Woman no longer held the monopoly over this power that she had held for tens of thousands of years. **The concept and the word Father were very gradually invented.** Female statuettes and representations of the vulva, linked to fecundity, were replaced by symbols of the phallus.

It was only in the 20th century of the Christian Era that genetics appeared. For a long time, it was commonly believed that blood played a part in reproduction (e.g. *True blood cannot lie*, the idea of consanguinity, etc.) Even today some communities do not have this modern knowledge about reproduction; they do not know about the role of the male; the concept and the word “Father” still do not exist for them.

Since the first historical Sumerian and Egyptian written records, their great myths talk of the way men took over the power which women had previously held over reproduction, they recount the gradual setting up of patriarchal societies organized to serve paternity, through the domination of males over females.

The story of Abram, recent in the history of the human species and only a few thousand years old, is one of the myths that recount this transfer of power. A transfer of power? Surely, since it was soon to lead to the control of women's wombs by men, control over their virginity at first and then their fidelity, which was to legitimize the violence done to women thereafter.

The story of Abram (the foundation stone of communities which were to be organized around the text of “Genesis”, communities whose population was in the majority for some time) recounts the *fertility covenant*, a covenant made for a man renamed Abraham “Father of the multitude”. Circumcision symbolizes this alliance by a ring issued from the phallus – the part that man finally understood to be the reproductive tool. However, it was a genital part belonging to Man, not to Woman. Woman was thereby completely excluded from this reproductive covenant.

Later, Christianity can be seen as an attempt to break away from this radical patriarchy, revolutionary ideas were taken up, bringing an end to circumcision, thereby making an exit from the fertility covenant, men and women were now equal in baptism, and the love of one's neighbour even outside of Abraham's lineage. This did not last long, the Church “Fathers” went back to the Old Testament and its reproductive message, less than three centuries after the beginning of Christianity, at the time of Marcion of Sinope's death.

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The deconstruction of this ideology of reproduction, its mental and non-conscious internalisation, is very recent in our history and concerns only parts of the world.

- The first major opposition was synthesized in India, 2500 years ago, with **Buddhism**. The fundamental value and unique objective of Buddhism is the extinction of suffering of sentient beings. The outcome of this objective is *nirvana*, which corresponds to the end of the rebirth cycle and the discontinuation of *reincarnation* if we follow the recent occidental terminology: in other terms, the end of life reproduction. In Buddhist philosophy, *nirvana* corresponds in fact to the total extinction of the suffering sensations shared by all sentient beings.
- The second major opposition appears in the 24th century of the Era of Non-Suffering, in England with Darwin. **Darwinism** makes it possible to consider reproduction, and the evolution of species as having no purpose, that no finality existed before life, that there is no objective to the reproduction of life invented by some GOD or by some Intelligent Design of the Universe. Reproduction is no longer thought of as a divine project : living beings do not seek to reproduce themselves, do not have a reproductive strategy, quite simply living organisms not equipped with reproductive systems adapted to their environment will disappear; this is the case for the great majority of species. Only those organisms which are able to reproduce are left for us to see, hence this optical illusion of *finality*.
- A third opposition appears in the 25th century of the Era of Non-Suffering with the creation of a new science, **ethology**. By studying animal behaviour, Konrad Lorenz ruins the finalistic and popular concept of “instinct”, (the instinct of survival, of reproduction, maternal instinct) and replaces it with the concept of “instinctive actions”, without finality, simple chain reactions of cause and effect. The observations of Ethology are in fact simply the confirmation of and the extension of Darwin's theory to *behaviour patterns*, their evolution is thought to be identical to the evolution of *organs*, therefore selected according to their ability to adapt to the reproduction of the species, and without any final purpose.
- Lastly in the 25th century of the Era of Non-Suffering **feminism** and **the fight for sexual freedom** won great victories over the idea that sexuality serves only reproduction, and over the reduction of women's rôle to Motherhood. Gradually the repression of non reproductive sexual practices such as masturbation, homosexuality, sodomy or the use of contraception, diminished or even disappeared legally in certain parts of the world.

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What are the ideas at work for the future of the ideology of reproduction?

A game of plate tectonics is at play in the long term between two continents which foster fundamentally conflicting values: the **value of the reproduction of life** versus the value of **non-suffering**. This confrontation becomes all the more possible since reproduction is no longer considered an inevitable fact of nature, but more and more as the fruit of a conscious decision.

- On the one hand the **logic of knowledge** forces humanity to take into account the weight of the conditioning of the ideology of reproduction, therefore to free oneself from it. For this reason, the *pro-life* partisans of the ideology of reproduction are trying explicitly to manipulate public opinion by falsifying knowledge, by penetrating the scientific network and the mass Media. They aim first at Darwinism and more discretely at ethology. For them, the main battle of the third millennium is clearly about public opinion, since they have no power over the Law. In a democracy, an ideological victory comes before a political victory. The outcome of this battle is uncertain, with questions and possible backward steps about the right to choose how one uses one's own body, the right to contraception or the right to abortion.

This logic of knowledge feeds on the latest technological discoveries about life reproduction, which trouble public opinion by questioning the most deeply- rooted beliefs. Human reproduction is no longer the idea of a Nature-God, instead it has become more and more technically controllable, subjected to the will of Man. Due to the generalization of the new Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARP), such as “in vitro” fertilization at the end of the 20th Century, the 3rd millennium opens the collective imagination to reproductive cloning, to the artificial womb, and poses the dilemma of manipulating life through the use of technologies using stem cells in this new medical era. The idea is born: the child could become a real man-made product just like any other technical object, by an **artificial process**.

It is no longer possible to avoid the question of the legitimacy of this production: we discover a little more every day since the spread of contraception and of the ARP that to reproduce is firstly a cultural and not a natural phenomenon. **Therefore, is it legitimate to cause someone to live?** At the same time, a report from UNICEF reminds Humankind that “close to a billion children live in poverty” whilst disasters linked to climate and environmental changes are increasingly being forecast globally.

- On the other hand, **the value of non-suffering** is gaining authority in the Western World and has more and more supremacy over the old prevailing value of Life. In France the law on palliative care, passed in 1999, states that the value of non-suffering is superior to life, and logically this paves the way for the emergence of the *Right not to live*. It was also the theme of non-suffering that was developing internationally in the animal liberation movement at the end of the 20th Century by denouncing specism after racism and sexism.

The logic for the **right not to live** is simple: when the value of non-suffering becomes the supreme value then to impose life becomes illegitimate. Once a sentient being is born he is exposed to the risk of suffering, which causes him harm – both popular and scientific culture even consider that any form of life necessarily bears its own share of suffering whereas not to live avoids all harm, avoids even the harm of being deprived of happiness or any other form of deprivation.

Therefore, the 3rd millennium sees the emergence of this right in two stages and at both ends of life; on one end “the right to choose one's own death” and “the right not to be born” at the other end.

- the **right to choose one's own death** started its historical march of legalization in Europe (Switzerland, Netherlands, and Belgium) at the end of the 20th Century, which is only two centuries only after the legalization of suicide in France at the time of the Revolution, in 1789. This right has progressed more quickly than the right not to be born because it is promoted by a population that is larger and has more economic and political power: it is the population of seniors, the group that is most interested in the short term by the idea of not having to be subjected to suffering at the time of death;
- the **right not to be born**, a term coined by lawyers, makes a major entry into popular language at the end of the 20th century as far as France is concerned, with the Nicolas Perruche Case when the courts recognized the right of a child to bring suit against the harm of being born handicapped, a wrong done to him that has to be compensated for. But in the future, who might be in a position to measure the threshold of suffering, the limit that will give rights or that will refuse them? The *anti-Perruche* law voted shortly after, in 2002, provides that “no-one can claim to be wronged simply by being born”. The wrong of being born? A surprising law which by aiming to nip the idea in the bud, paradoxically puts a name on the unthinkable, opens the gates to the hypothetical right not to be born.

This emerging idea is reinforced at the beginning of the 21st century with debates around the right to same-sex parenting. A *right not to be born* starts being indirectly formulated by politicians themselves, after the lawyers: application of the precautionary principle, the forbidding of same-sex parenting due to the risk of imposing suffering on the child, because of the parents' circumstances. However, the argument came back as fast as a boomerang: What about allowing reproduction between parents who, albeit heterosexual, are violent, alcoholic, or incestuous? (and then we discover that in France, one child in ten is a victim of incest). And finally, what of the risk of suffering linked to all life, independent of family context? If, by forbidding same-sex parenting, society opens the case for the right not to be born to certain categories of children, then should we not establish that right for all children in the name of Equality before the law?

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In this conflict between the Ideology of reproduction and the value of Non-suffering, the advantage goes to the former which ensures its continuity through the physical and cultural reproduction of its human vehicle. Nothing reproduces better than reproduction.

Contrariwise, the culture of non-suffering must ensure its continuity without promoting the reproduction of its human vehicle. The key to this Darwinian challenge is universal consciousness.

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