



# The Multiple Moral Problems of Surrogacy

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Sometimes when there is infertility in marriage, couples make the decision to seek out the services of a surrogate in order to have a child. A surrogate is a woman who agrees to be implanted with an embryo produced by *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and to hand over the newborn baby to the couple upon completion of the gestation and birth. In recent years, gestational surrogacy has become a multi-million dollar industry, attracting a broad clientele ranging from married couples to single women, gay couples to anyone else with the desire for a baby and the ability to finance the undertaking. Surrogacy raises grave moral concerns, and powerfully undermines the dignity of human procreation, particularly when it comes to the women and children involved in the process.

One of the significant moral concerns around surrogacy is that it introduces fractures into parenthood by multiplying parental roles. Surrogacy coerces children into situations where they are subjected to the unhealthy stresses of ambiguous or split origins, perhaps being conceived from one woman's egg, gestated by another woman, raised by a third, and maybe even dissociated from their father by anonymous sperm donation. Such practices end up being profoundly

unfair and dehumanizing for the children caught in the web of the process. One woman, who was herself conceived by anonymous sperm donation, describes her experience this way:

"My existence owed almost nothing to the serendipitous nature of normal human reproduction, where babies are the natural progression of mutually fulfilling adult relationships, but rather represented a verbal contract, a financial transaction and a cold, clinical harnessing of medical technology."

Moreover, women who sign up as surrogates often feel deeply conflicted about giving up the baby at birth and tearing asunder an important 9 month connection and relationship that had been carefully developed and nurtured.

There can be no doubt that the hawkers and promoters of surrogacy exploit vulnerable, financially challenged women, often in overseas settings, to undergo the risks of drug-induced artificial pregnancy. While the proponents of the procedure will often portray these women as motivated primarily by a desire to help others, surrogates them-

# Making Sense of Bioethics

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selves will privately note how they do it for the money, and in the absence of substantial payments, wouldn't be willing to move ahead with the arduous procedure. Alex Kuczynski, describing her own experience of engaging a surrogate in a 2008 New York Times interview, speaks frankly:

“We encountered the wink-nod rule: Surrogates would never say they were motivated to carry a child for another couple just for money; they were all motivated by altruism. This gentle hypocrisy allows surrogacy to take place. Without it, both sides would have to acknowledge the deep cultural revulsion against attaching a dollar figure to the creation of a human life.”

Indeed, surrogacy involves turning human life into a commodity on multiple levels, as Kathleen Sloan recently described in testimony given to a Minnesota state commission studying the issue. A seemingly unlikely opponent of the procedure, Sloan works as a pro-abortion feminist and director of the National Organization for Women in Connecticut. On gestational surrogacy, however, she agrees with pro-life criti-

cisms, noting how it involves

“children intentionally severed from genetic and biological sources of identity, human rights be damned. In essence, it is the ultimate manifestation of the neoliberal project of capitalist commodification of all life to create profit and fulfill the narcissistic desires of an entitled elite.”

Those narcissistic desires are readily catered to by an IVF industry that generates offspring in the laboratory for clients. In this process, extra embryonic humans are produced, stored and oftentimes orphaned in freezers, or even discarded outright by throwing them away as “biomedical waste.” In fact, the process of IVF, central to the practice of surrogacy, generally ends up killing more babies than it delivers. Coupled with the fact that contracting couples can pressure the surrogate mother to undergo an abortion if the in-utero child appears to be “imperfect,” or to eliminate a twin through “selective reduction” in a multiple pregnancy, it can hardly be disputed that children are pawns in the merciless endgame of satisfying parental and customer

desires and corporate profit motives.

A woman's reproductive powers and her God-given fecundity should never be reduced to the status of a “gestator for hire” or a “breeder” as they are sometimes called by industry insiders, nor should women be exploited by allowing payment for harvesting their eggs. A woman's procreative powers ought to be shared uniquely through marital acts with her husband, so that all the children born of her are genetically and otherwise her own. All children merit and deserve this loving consideration and assurance of protection at the point of their fragile and sacred beginnings.

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