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TO: TIME RELIGION

FROM: LONDON BY: CHRIS HANSON(CBA)

SLUG: TEST TUBE ETHICS ECH:

IS DR STEPTOE'S SUCCESSFUL EMBRYO TRANSPLANT THE PRELUDE TO A BRAVE NEW WORLD OF 'PEOPLE-FACTORIES', OR IS THE TECHNIQUE ETHICALLY JUSTIFIABLE? TAKING THE FORMER VIEW, LONDON DAILY EXPRESS (AKA DAILY EXCESS) EDITOR DEREK JAMESON SOUNDS A HEADLINE ALARM: 'WE COULD GET BABY FARMS, MASS PRODUCED KIDS, 1984 SIX YEARS EARLY. THE ONLY PARALLEL IS IN ABOUT 94 FRANKENSTEIN FILMS.' THIS IS AN EXTREME VIEW (AND PERHAPS REVEALS A TRACE OF SOUR GRAPES--JAMESON LOST HIS BID FOR EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE OF THE BIRTH.) DR. ANN MCLAREN, DESCRIBED AS THE FOREMOST BRITISH AUTHORITY ON ANIMAL EMBRYO TRANSFER, TAKES ISSUE WITH JAMESON: 'THE TECHNIQUE WHICH I USE IN ANIMALS (AND STEPTOE USED ON MRS BROWN) YIELDS NO KNOWLEDGE WHATSOEVER WHICH WOULD HELP OTHER SCIENTISTS TO DEVELOP AN 'ARTIFICIAL PLACENTA' TO KEEP A FETUS ALIVE FOR VERY LONG OUTSIDE THE WOMB. TEST TUBE BABY IS A MISNOMER (FOR THE BROWN-STEPTOE CHILD). 'EMBRYO TRANSPLANT' IS BETTER. EMBRYO TRANSPLANT IN FACT MAKES FUTURE TEST TUBE BABIES LESS LIKELY BECAUSE IT ELIMINATES MOST REASON FOR WANTING THEM.'

IF STEPTOE IS NOT BRINGING ON A BRAVE NEW WORLD, SOME HAVE QUESTIONED THE SAFETY OF EMBRYO TRANSPLANT ON OTHER GROUNDS.

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IN 1974, BRITAIN'S MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL REFUSED TO AWARD STEPTOE AND EDWARDS A GRANT FOR EMBRYO TRANSPLANT WORK, FEARING THAT BABIES BORN AFTER TRANSPLANT MIGHT BE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BIRTH DEFECTS. ACCORDING TO A SPOKESMAN FOR THE COUNCIL, STEPTOE WAS TURNED DOWN BECAUSE INSUFFICIENT WORK WITH ANIMALS HAD BEEN DONE TO SHOW THAT WORK ON HUMANS WAS SAFE. THE REPRESENTATIVE OF A BRITISH ORGANIZATION WHICH BESTOWS MEDICAL RESEARCH FUNDS SAYS THAT, IF STEPTOE APPLIED FOR MONEY TODAY, HE WOULD PROBABLY NOT GET IT DUE TO CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS.

"NONSENSE," RETORTS DR DOUGLAS PAULKNER, AN ANIMAL BREEDING SPECIALIST AT EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY. "EGG TRANSPLANTS HAVE BEEN WIDELY DONE IN ANIMALS WITHOUT DANGEROUS EFFECTS." DR MCCLAREN GOES EVEN FURTHER: "ONCE THE FETUS IS SAFELY DEVELOPING IN THE WOMB, MY EXPERIMENTS WITH ANIMALS SHOW THAT THERE IS LESS CHANCE OF ABNORMAL BIRTH THAN IN NORMAL CONCEPTIONS."

TEST TUBE CHILDREN MIGHT HAVE AS GOOD OR BETTER ODDS OF BEING BORN PHYSICALLY NORMAL AS ANYONE ELSE. BUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH UNDER THE HOT, UNRELENTING T.V. LIGHTS IS ANOTHER MATTER. PUBLICITY MIGHT WARP THE CHILD'S PERSONALITY, MAKE HIM SEEM A FREAK TO OTHERS AND TO HIMSELF. "A PUBLICIZED (TEST TUBE) CHILD," SAYS GUARDIAN EDITOR PETER PRESTON, "MIGHT BE FORCED TO LEAD HIS LIFE WITH A BLANKET OVER HIS HEAD." AT ONE TIME, DR MCCLAREN AGREED WITH PRESTON, BUT NO LONGER. "I ONCE SAID THAT I FEARED AN EMBRYO TRANSPLANT CHILD WOULD BE VIEWED AS A CROSS BETWEEN A VIRGIN BIRTH AND A FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER. BUT I THINK PUBLIC OPINION IS CHANGING. PEOPLE ARE GETTING USED TO THE IDEA, SOME OF THE ALARMIST CHARGES HAVE BEEN SHOWN FALSE." CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE CHILD IS WHAT LED THE DAILY EXPRESS TO AVOID

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PRINTING THE FAMILY NAME WHEN IT BROKE THE TEST TUBE STORY
AHEAD OF THE PACK LAST WEEK. BUT WITHIN TWENTY FOUR HOURS THE
NAME WAS OUT. THE CHILD MAY BE REGARDED AS A FREAK, BUT HE OR
SHE IS LIKELY TO BE A VERY WEALTHY FREAK.

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