

AN EDIPUS COMPLEX TOWARD LIFE*

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Abortion deprives us of the deepest instincts of humanity. This is the conclusion which lies at the bottom of the heated debate, which still rages within the United States and ought to stir the world itself. From the racist eugenics-oriented movements, which introduced the idea of systematic abortion early in this century, to the current righteous defense of indifferent abortion, the results are the same: they rest on the premise that we can become dull, insensitive to the claim of humanity which is at stake.

The preferred philosophical base of pro-abortionists resembles the Oedipus prophecy—there are exceptional cases in which humanity itself recoils from demanding that a pregnancy be carried full term. Rape, incest, and deformity usually head the list. This kind of reasoning has a glaring default. It will be understood best if one rehearses the college philosophy example of the life-raft scenario. Two persons adrift at sea on a life-raft are starving. Their chances are minimal at best and absolutely nil if nourishment is not found. In that situation, is it just that one of the two might resort to cannibalism (eating the other) in order to have any chance at all of surviving? Generally, everyone answers yes, just as most people are inclined to say, “yes, in the case of incest I can conceive of abortion as at least a justifiable homicide.” Ought we to conclude from this exception, however, that the general moral rule must therefore admit the propriety of cannibalism or abortion in any case? Clearly that is not so, and we require above all today to make clear why it is not so.

When a decade ago I asked the “right to life” movement to speak of the “unborn child” instead of the “foetus,” the motivating idea was that language plays an important role in focusing our moral antennae and such a tactic was needed to fend off the insensitivity with which we were surrounded. I continue to believe that this is necessary, but we now require more than words, we need to resurrect an entire humanitarian tradition in order to prevail in this struggle.

Nothing demonstrates the necessity of this conclusion so strongly as the recent report from South Korea, that selective abortion is there being practiced to indulge social prejudice about the preferred gender of offspring. Unborn girls are being aborted to make room for boys in South Korea. One needs to pause and think over the implications of this. The progress of modern science has made possible a pre-term identification of gender in the unborn child. What has followed is this systematic abortion—a eugenics. But don’t stop there. Note that the very idea of identifying a child’s gender entails a necessary moral distinction. A girl is a human being! No one who has ordered the death of his unborn girl can claim to have any doubts about her humanity. What he is saying to us is that he prefers boy humans to girl humans. As occurs so often in human affairs, we discover in the practical arts of human beings a much surer guide to answering difficult moral questions than in mountains of abstruse scientific disputation. While the scientists continue to debate about just when the onset of humanity occurs, the people of South Korea

demonstrate that they know full well: namely, from the moment one can determine the unborn child's gender!

One would imagine that this discovery merited headlines and huzzahs: The long sought answer found! Unborn child determined to be human boy or girl! Supreme Court now has guide to follow! But no. The news is rather different. "S. Korean Parents Tip Birth Ratio." "In the first ten months of the year, there were 117 male births for every 100 females." Normally, male births outnumber female births, only slightly, and the numbers are evened up later by a higher mortality rate among males. One of the Korean doctors, who sounded the alarm, Dr. Roh Gyung Byung, declared it "a terrible situation," and rightly so.

Do we understand, however, just how terrible it is? This story is in fact confirmation of just how low we have descended in the scale of humanity. Abortions are not new to mankind. Mankind, however, has not always been so insensitive to them. The classic story of abortion—exposure of the unwanted infant—was written by Sophocles and inspired Sigmund Freud with the lynchpin of his psychological theories, the Edipus complex. Sophocles' Oedipus was to be exposed just after his birth, but the nurse entrusted with the chore could not look upon the "bundle of joy" with the required callousness. Rather than leave the child to the tender mercies of wild beasts, she left it in the care of a peasant who raised him to a mature humanity. The tragedy that resulted for Oedipus' family has often been misinterpreted as resulting from the nurses' tenderness. A more understanding reading would show that it derived rather from the decision to abort—an attempt to avoid a prophecy of tragedy, which misread the prophecy as referring to events yet to come and not to the character of the very persons who attempted the abortion.

The children who are exposed today are less fortunate. They never meet with such nurses, as Oedipus' even when they might have a chance of being raised to mature humanity by strangers. Despite the feeble efforts of government to mandate care for aborted children who, with the assistance of science, might yet survive, the prevailing moral climate produces virtually no examples of such heroics. Is it not clear that the child who is exposed by being ripped from the womb is at a great disadvantage compared to Oedipus? Those whose souls would have to resonate with the instincts of humanity are already dulled into insensitivity by the very operation through which they eliminate the child.

The modern world cannot depend on second thoughts to preserve the instincts of humanity. Modern science leaves no room for second thoughts. Lest we are to part forever from the tradition of humane caring, we have no alternative but to place abortion itself under a severe proscription. The Edipus Complex—a son's rivalry with his father and love for his mother and its converse, the Electra Complex—acquires a perverse meaning in a world in which fathers and mothers make the choices which South Korean parents are now making. The new Oedipus must die, unless we collectively, as a generation, make a commitment to him before he is exposed to the danger. This is the possibility we now await, assuming that he is not already among the lost.

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