

LIFE BEGINS WHEN...AND ENDS WHEN...

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This Thinksheet's **occasion**: yesterday our MA Supreme Court dismissed the request--by the New England Christian [sic] Action Council--that an anti-abortion question be put on the state's November ballot. The question was to ask us voters to define, in biological terms, when life begins: check here "conception, viability or birth" or write in "specifying a different biological term." NECAC's president Jn. Rankin said a consensus on when human life begins is needed to redress what he considers Roe v. Wade's failure to answer this question. It's clear that NECAC means, by "life," human life under full protection of the laws of the land; specifically, that any "taking of life" is murder except such as is crime-incurred (viz, execution) or war-incurred: abortion is **murder**--no wonder Bush fell into confusion, in his first debate with Dukakis, over what punishment to mete out to murderer women, ie, women who voluntarily choose abortion (and next day lamely claimed that only the abortionist, not the woman, is a punishable criminal--a fence-sitting that satisfies neither side of this private/public controversy)....The spate of new American dictionaries reflects the conflict.

Biologically, it's easy to define when "life," human life, begins: it's when there's bio-material of telic potential, ie, potency toward full bio-development. (Why so technical? Why not just growth potential? Tumors have growth potential, too, but nontelic.)....Transbiologically, though, we're in trouble: values & judgments are **pro-leptically** read back from the telos, from full bio-development, into the earlier stages of the human bio-material in order to accomodate religious, cultural, and legal persuasions. It's fraudulent to confuse the two perspectives if the confusion is rhetorical-political; even when one does it in intellectual innocence, the consequences are pernicious. The door is not double-hung, swinging both ways. The door opens into the biological from the transbiological; but from biology one can make no valid transbiological statements. (The logical fallacy in the NECAC's thinking finds a parallel in the thinking, and textbooks, of the "scientific creationists.")

Let's look at the flow of bio-material as a series of **births**:

Birth #1 is the coming into being of human genetic material, **genes** that will set the potentials & parameters of human beings. We're at the dawn of a new factor here: gene-splitting/grafting for disease control but with eugenic possibilities.

Birth #2 is the coming into being of **spermata** (sperms) and **ova** (eggs).....Almost none of this human organic material gets to contribute to baby-making: God, "nature," is profligate with it. But because no "human being," "individual," is lost with the death of what doesn't make it to the third birth, antiabortionists don't work themselves up over it.

Birth #3 is the coming into being, by cellular sexual union, of the **zygote**, which has the full, intradevelopmental telic potential of a "human being," "an individual"--as it is in itself a human being, an individual, at least proleptically a person ("person" being the relative term for a human individual). To increase the sense of the preciousness & sacrality of the zygote, some use the tautology "unique individual," though the two words are not entirely synonymous. Note: (1) Spacially, not "individual" as long as mother-connected; (2) "unique" is not a scientific term, since science can't speak of non/repeatability; (3) profligacy again: almost no zygotes become people, bio-developed human beings: God alone, in unintended miscarriages, is their abortionist.

Birth #4 is the coming into being of the fissioned zygote, the **embryo**--the Greek term for till "the end of the second month" (RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY, 2nd ed., 1987; the classic, pre-pop-usage WEBSTER'S UNABRIDGED, 2nd ed., has the 3rd month--reflecting an earlier stage of formation-knowledge).

Birth #5 is the **fetus**, the Latin word for the organism from embryo to separation from the mother. (Web.: "usu. after the third month, the young is called a fetus." Note the bio-term "the young," not the emotionally loaded "the unborn child.")

Birth #6 is the **infant**, Latin for "incapable of speech," the prelinguistic human being, given a name even though (anthropologically) not a person (to be which requires the distinctively human symbol-exchange called, strictly, "language").

Birth #7 is the **child**, the language animal no matter how few the words.

The incidence of puberty, reproductive ability, constitutes **birth #8**. Terminology here is not settled, but **older child** is a common reference. The legal status of this stage is improving to the extent, which is limited, to which expansion of legal rights downward to it is viewed as an improvement. Proleptically, this stage is viewed as **adolescent** (Latin, "becoming, on the way to being, adult"), (RHD2) "terminating legally when the age of majority is reached; youth."

Birth #9 is the coming into being of the **adult**, with full social responsibilities and accordingly under the full freedoms and responsibilities of the law of the land.

Birth #10 is of what I'll call here, the ^{no}being no word for it, the emergence of the **cosmicus**, the person of cosmic awareness & awareness of cosmic responsibility. More, but in no way less, than Erikson's "generativity." The West's "the saint"; the East's "the spiritually evolved."

---Note that as I've extended "birth," I may also extend "womb." Birth #1 is, roughly put, in the womb of the gene pool. #2, in sexually mature bodies. #3, almost always in the uterus. #4 & #5, in the uterus. #6 & #7, the womb is the family, defined as the infant/child's most intimate community. #8, the womb is family + peer/play/work groups. #9, the womb is society at all levels. #10, the womb is the cosmos, the universe & beyond in source & destiny; God, before whom we stand and in whom we live.

So much for the first half of this Thinksheet's title. Now to the second half:
When does life end?

Biological death occurs sometime after births #1-#8. **Social** death can occur after the 9th birth, and **spiritual** death after the 10th birth....Note that #1-#8 are bio-stages, sequential. Some in the 8th stage show remarkable evidences of being into their 9th birth, & sometimes astonishing evidences of being into their 10th birth.

Now for a few notes on the deaths, indicated by birth-numbers....Note first a third lexical extension in this Thinksheet: first, "birth"; next, "womb"; now, "death"--which to cover my usage here I define as **cessation of developmental potential**.

Deaths #1 & #2 we may pass over as having little, though emergent, moral significance. ("Emergent": the more the medical scitech, the more the moral significance--"moral" meaning involving human decision-making.) Exception: those rejecting "artificial" conception-control see high moral significance in preventing zygoting (1) mechanically (condoms, diaphragms, IUD, et al), (2) surgically (male- & female tying & ectomies), & (3) chemically (the pill, spermicides, oviduces).

Death #3 has just now become possible: the French zygoticidal pill, illegal in the USA but soon to be common among us. If any form of voluntary abortion is acceptable, this is it, for what dies is in the earliest development, one may even say the predevelopmental, stage. But for the absolutist antiabortionist this abortifacient is the greatest medical-science curse to date, attacking "the unborn child" even before awareness of pregnancy....1987, RHD2, is too long ago for this development: voluntary abortion (involuntary being miscarriage) is "the removal of [add "a zygote"] of an embryo or fetus...to end a pregnancy." Future dictionaries will have "zygoticide."

Death #4 is the midlevel of abortion seriousness, roughly the one Roe v. Wade monkeyed around with. (Yes, I think the Supreme Court should not have gotten into biology.) RHD2 synonymizes "feticide" & "aborticide."

Death #5 is the most serious form of abortion, viz, feticide proper. To avoid unwanted pregnancies, I preach celibacy: to avoid this most serious form of abortion, I advocate, and believe religious & public-health forces should push, the two earlier abortions.

Death #6 is infanticide; murder I call it, as also **deaths #7-#9**....**Death #10** has been & will be the subject of many a Thinksheet!