

Dangerous Animals?

David Snoko (*PSCF* 56, no. 2 [2004]: 117–25) argues that dangerous animals form part of God’s “very good” creation (Gen. 1:31). He omits to mention that the animals in Genesis 1 were entirely herbivorous (vv. 29–30). Nature at this stage was not “red in tooth and claw.”

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A Plea for Relevance in Discussing hES

Whatever one’s final conclusion about the ethics of human embryonic stem cell (hES) research, the arguments should be logical and well-founded. Mannoia’s “An Evaluation of Three Religious Perspectives in Stem Cell Research” (*PSCF* 56, no. 3 [2004]: 216–25) unfortunately repeats some common errors and adds a novel one.

Following our intuitions (p. 221) is not an adequate basis for moral standards. True, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23), but this applies to the individual. Paul is clear in this passage that an individual may be self-condemned for what is not sinful. “Let my conscience be your guide” is not a valid principle, but comes close to what is often argued.

Mannoia assumes that a zygote is a “someone.” The argument is that anything that has a history is a person: fetus, therefore embryo (p. 221)—therefore zygote, therefore ovum, therefore polar cell, which may be fertilized but can never develop for lack of cytoplasm—etc. Since cells, and even the components of cells, have histories, the claim needs more justification than an *ipse dixit*, hers or Percy’s (p. 223). Another evangelical, Richard Bube, had a different, thoughtful take on the matter.¹ Something he could not at the time note is that at least one-third of naturally fertilized ova do not implant. Herb Spencer claims 70%, adding that this means that, assuming all zygotes to be persons in God’s sight, the vast majority of the redeemed will be these entities that perish early.² Or will these add to the number in limbo or perdition, for they cannot be christened?

Mannoia writes: “Nowhere in Scripture do we find justification for sacrificing an innocent life to help others” (p. 222). But, as she notes later, is this not what our Lord did, gave himself for our salvation? Does personal choice make a vital difference, as claimed? How does Mannoia’s claim fit with the biblical statement that Caiaphas the high priest was inspired when he said: “Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:49–51). It is well that she provides a momentary qualification (the embryo may not be a person) lacking in the previous section (p. 221) and rejected in the following one (p. 222).

While in the normal production of young, neither ovum nor sperm cell “is capable of producing a viable

human on its own” (p. 222), ova may be manipulated to produce embryos. At least in other species, a manipulated ovum can substitute for a zygote. This has not been proved impossible in *Homo sapiens*.

The concurrence of the church fathers regarding total opposition to abortion must be qualified. They could not be fully confident of pregnancy until quickening, the time when the fetus is large enough for its movement to be felt. The lack of menses is an earlier indicator, to be sure. But, since amenorrhea has multiple causes, it is not a certain sign.

The claim, “One could argue that this holds not only for abortion, but also for hES research, as it too involves something ‘conceived in the womb’” (p. 223) is ridiculous. The ova involved in hES research and *in vitro* fertilization for assisted reproduction do not pass through the womb. This is so blatant an error as to suggest blindness among the reviewers as well as the author. A related minor problem is that normal fertilization takes place before the ovum reaches the uterus.

The arguments from Scripture (p. 223), while representative of the evangelical position, hardly support the claim that all zygotes are persons. One needs to ask what is the *terminus a quo* of God’s knowledge. Is it the moment of conception? Paul says it is “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4; see also Acts 15:18; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). It is necessary that God know an individual at the moment of conception if his knowledge extends back before creation.³ His knowledge also includes sparrows and every hair (Matt. 10:29f; Luke 12:6f), but they are not persons.

One may analyze this matter further. The verses quoted by Mannoia are all statements from adults who are clearly persons, who recognize God’s involvement in their entire lifetimes. This fails to claim that God ascribes personhood to every zygote, embryo, or even fetus. It may be so, for nothing in these verses contradicts this strong claim. But there is no support either.

It has been often noted that advocates of “choice” and of “life” do not communicate: they yell at each other, or at best, talk past each other. Mannoia’s study, which repeats arguments common among evangelicals with claims that exceed their support, does not promote dialogue. She is thus only “preaching to the choir,” though one has to wonder whether the choir is nodding in agreement, or has nodded off. While “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21 NIV), there is no premium on any Christian presenting foolish arguments.

Notes

¹Richard H. Bube, *The Human Quest: A New Look at Science and the Christian Faith* (Waco: Word, 1971), 221–30.

²“Readers Write,” *Christianity Today* (September 2004): 12.

³This phrasing is not technically correct, but to express timeless divine knowledge is very difficult.

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