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“The Dinner Party Test” — The Revenge of Moral Consciousness

Wednesday, April 18, 2007



The Independent [London] has published an amazing report indicating that Britain faces a “crisis” in the availability of abortion. It seems that “an unprecedented number of doctors are refusing to be involved in carrying out the procedure.”

As the [paper reports](#), “The exodus of doctors prepared to perform the task is a nationwide phenomenon that threatens to plunge the abortion service into chaos, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has warned.”

This makes sense, of course. Why would doctors — who dedicate their lives to saving lives — choose to deploy their medical skills in the service of killing unborn babies? The “crisis” feared by The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is a crisis of recovered moral consciousness.

One paragraph in the paper’s report is too important to miss. Look closely at these words:

Distaste at performing terminations combined with ethical and religious convictions has led to a big increase in “conscientious objectors” who request exemption from the task, the RCOG says. A key factor is what specialists call “the dinner party test”. Gynaecologists who specialise in fertility treatment creating babies for childless couples are almost universally revered - but no one boasts of being an abortionist.

This is a truly remarkable paragraph. The moral conscience rears its head in unexpected ways. “The dinner party test” is an amazing example of a common grace display of suppressed moral knowledge.

Philosopher Leon Kass, former chairman of the President’s Council on Bioethics, has long argued that humanity demonstrates a basic level of moral knowledge through a moral instinct he calls the “Yuck Factor.” As he explains, humans almost instinctively know that some actions are morally wrong, even if they have no elaborated moral argument to back up their judgment.

This new test — “The Dinner Party Test” — is very similar, but even more fascinating. Put bluntly, doctors who help people to have babies “are almost universally revered,” while “no one boasts of being an abortionist.”

The fundamental ugliness and tragic sinfulness of abortion makes for an awkward introduction at a dinner party. “I abort babies” is almost surely to lead to awkwardness and strained expressions from fellow guests — even if these people claim to be “pro-choice.”

That response of moral repugnance reveals something of vital importance. “The Dinner Party Test” is a reminder that moral knowledge may be denied and repressed for some time, but it reappears in unexpected ways. The real “crisis” is a crisis of conscience reasserting itself.

The Culture of Death is a most awkward and embarrassing guest at a dinner party. “The Dinner Party Test” gets right

to the heart of the matter.

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