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Will New Technologies Mean the End of Abortion?

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In *The Brethren*, reporter Bob Woodward of the Washington Post revealed confusion among the pro-abortion justices as they sought a legal justification and argument. Justice Harry Blackmun drafted the majority opinion and, throwing out millennia of moral wisdom, decided that a woman's "right" to an abortion is established in her "right" to privacy—even as he admitted that the Constitution never explicitly grants either right. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Byron White revealed the nakedness of the majority's argument: "I cannot accept the Court's exercise of its clear power of choice by interposing a constitutional barrier to state efforts to protect human life and by investing mothers and doctors with the constitutionally protected right to exterminate it." [see decision and dissents]

Blackmun also dabbled in medicine. [Woodward suggests that this is rooted in Blackmun's experience as counsel to the Mayo Clinic. He may have had a case of doctor-envy.] He invented a system of gestational trimesters as a way of "balancing" the interests of the woman and the state. As the majority's opinion states: "With respect to the State's important and legitimate interest in potential life, the 'compelling' point is at viability."

Therefore, the decision granted the woman an unrestricted right to an abortion during the first trimester, a qualified right during the second trimester, and a more qualified right during the third trimester. Of course, subsequent Court decisions effectively removed the state's right to interfere with the woman's access to abortion at any stage—until recently.

The nation's conscience has grown weary of abortion, and the legislative victory in banning partial-birth abortions is the first sign of a cracking in the death culture of post-Roe America.

Another major issue has also emerged as rapid advances in medicine have pushed fetal viability well into the second trimester—and may soon push viability all the way back to conception. The "compelling point" is on the move.

The August 18 issue of *The New Republic* features an article by Sacha Zimmerman that warns its readers of "The Real Threat to Roe v. Wade." That threat? Ectogenesis. Just in case this term is not yet a part of your conversation over breakfast, be informed that ectogenesis "is the process by which a fetus gestates in an environment external to the mother." [see magazine's website]

The article details rapid advances in the development of artificial wombs and artificial amniotic fluids that could mean that an embryo could develop all the way to maturity in this artificial environment. Once this happens, viability begins with conception—and, as Zimmerman notes: "If and when that happens, the legal and philosophical premises underpinning Roe could be completely dismantled."

Without doubt, this new technology itself raises a host of moral and ethical issues. The opportunities for its misuse will be legion. But, as this article makes clear, ectogenesis is a significant threat to the culture of death and the logic of Roe, and that, by any measure, is good news.

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