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# Where Did I Come From? – It's No Longer a Simple Question

*It is as if we are now living on a new planet — one in which all the natural boundaries of sex and reproduction have been left behind. The technologies of reproduction are redefining sex, marriage, relationships, family, and the human story.*

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At some point, anticipated and even feared by some parents, every child asks the inevitable question: “Where did I come from?” That question is endemic to humanity. The question of our own biological origins is eventually inescapable. Our existence requires an explanation, and the question takes bold form. The answer used to be easy.

That is, the answer was easy in terms of biology. In some form, the answer took the shape of a story about two people, one male and one female, who came together and made a baby. Mommy and Daddy made a baby. That story was both true and universal. For most of human history, there was no alternative account. The answer given by parents in 1960 was the same as that given in 1060 or in any previous year.

All that changed with the biological revolution and the emergence of new reproductive technologies. The development of *In Vitro* Fertilization technologies [IVF] came only after human beings grew accustomed to reproductive control through The Pill. If medical technologies could be harnessed to avoid pregnancy, surely new technologies could allow couples to have long-wanted children who had not come by natural means.



The public was assured that the use of these technologies would not bring about a moral revolution, since the availability of these new technologies would be limited to married couples. But, of course, this was a false promise, and it should have been seen as such from the start. The Pill was at first prescribed only for married couples, but the plain fact is that a far greater demand for contraceptives existed among the non-married. By the early 1970s, The Pill was available to all.

The same story applied to the use of IVF, as well. If there were thousands of potential users among married couples, these were vastly outnumbered by non-married persons and non-heterosexual couples. The development of IVF and the revolutions made possible by egg and sperm donation and surrogate motherhood made parenthood, though redefined, now available to virtually any adult and any couple.

This revolution is portrayed movingly in the January 2, 2011 cover story of *The New York Times Magazine*. In “Meet the Twiblings,” Melanie Thornstrom provides an account of how she and her husband became parents to babies Violet and Kieran, who appear adorably on the cover of the magazine. The cover text also contains this teaser: “How four women (and one man) conspired to make two babies.”

As Thornstrom acknowledges, this is a complicated story. The two babies were born five days apart. They shared a common egg donor (obtained commercially) and a common sperm donor (Thornstrom’s husband, Michael). But they were carried by two different surrogate mothers. Genetically they are siblings, but they emerged from two different wombs. They were born five days apart, but they are not really twins. Thornstrom calls them “twiblings.”

She writes movingly of her efforts, with Michael, to have a child. After six IVF rounds and clear medical advice, the

Thernstroms moved to develop a new plan, but the plan required a great deal of thinking. The pull of the new reproductive technologies was clear, as was the revolution these technologies represent. She writes, “Reproductive technology fills an important — and growing — need. Gay couples are increasingly choosing to have families. Eight percent of women between 40 and 44 identify themselves as involuntarily childless or hoping to become pregnant, according to a Pew report. Most women in that age bracket will be able to become pregnant only by using donor eggs.”

Melanie and Michael wanted siblings of about the same age to grow up as companions. IVF twins were more dangerous, so Michael came up with the idea of using two surrogates to deliver two babies at about the same time.

Thernstrom’s account of the complexities of the decision-making process is fascinating, but what many readers may miss is the basic fact that virtually all of these decisions were absolutely unknown to previous generations of humanity. Would they choose an egg donor who looked like Melanie? The Thernstrom’s were more interested in personality attributes, even if these are hard to define in genetic terms. They eventually chose a donor with a “delightful” personality.

They also chose the surrogate mothers with care. Melanie noted that moral concerns about surrogacy came from both liberals and conservatives, if on different grounds. She chose two women who, made pregnant with the embryos created by the donor eggs and Michael’s sperm, carried the Thernstrom’s reproductive hopes, as well.

Melanie and Michael referred to these babies as “drafts.” In her words, they did this “to remind ourselves that they were notes toward the children we wanted, but if they died, they were just beginnings like all the embryos had been, and we would start again.”

Kieran was born first, with Violet arriving five days later. Both are adorable and healthy. The roles of the surrogate mothers did not end with the births, however, for the Thernstroms — against the prevailing advice — chose to maintain a relationship with the surrogates and the egg donor.

Interestingly, Melanie Thernstrom seems to see the complexity of these births as somewhat advantageous. “I wanted to avoid what I think of as the claustrophobia of the nuclear family,” she explains. She refers to the web of relationships required by this process as “a kind of extended family.”

She also acknowledges the ambiguities created by these new technologies. “Third-party reproduction creates all kinds of relationships for which there are not yet terms,” she explained. “For example, there is no word to describe the relationship between our children and the carriers’ children, but it feels to me that they are, somehow, related. They are gestational siblings; they don’t share a mother, father or genes, but they were carried in the same body and they learned its fathomless chemical language.”

Furthermore:

*There is also no word to describe our children’s relationship with each other. Our children were born five days apart — a fact that cannot be easily explained. When people press me about their status (“But are they really twins?”), the answer gets long. The word “twins” usually refers to siblings who shared a womb. But to call them just “siblings” instead of “twins” also raises questions because full genetic siblings are ordinarily at least nine months apart. And our children could be considered the same age because they were conceived at the same time (in the lab) and the embryos were transferred at the same time. If the person continues to quibble about whether they really qualify as twins (as, surprisingly, people often do), instead of asking why it matters, I announce airily that they are “twiblings.”*

Barely a week before, pop icon Elton John and his partner, David Furnish, “had” a baby boy. *The Guardian* [London] explained that the baby came “with the help of an anonymous Californian surrogate and a separate egg donor.” The birth of the baby boy, named Zachary Jackson Levon Furnish-John, created something of a stir in the British press, but the main issue of concern seemed to be the fact that Elton John is 62 and David Furnish is 48. The issue of homosexuality was so politically incorrect that age appeared to be the only factor of interest. Zoe Williams of *The Guardian* went so far as to proclaim that the whole event added up to the fact that “homophobia is dying.”

It is as if we are now living on a new planet — one in which all the natural boundaries of sex and reproduction have been left behind. The technologies of reproduction are redefining sex, marriage, relationships, family, and the human story. Humanity is rushing headlong into a world in which the answer to the question, “Where did I come from?” can be

endlessly complicated. We have no adequate categories for explaining the relationship of little Kieran and Violet and all those who “conspired” to bring them to be. We read the birth announcement of Zachary Jackson Levon Furnish-John, and we know that the most important moral questions are already off-limits.

An entire industry now operates with a global reach, offering these reproductive technologies to virtually anyone with the cash to pay. You can count on reproductive technologies expanding as a growth industry.

The theological and moral implications of all this are endless and urgent, but the technologies rush ahead. For Christians, the most urgent issue is the total separation of natural marriage from the process of human reproduction that is made possible by these technologies. The moral complexities surrounding Kieran and Violet Thernstrom and their “extended family” are vexing. We naturally sympathize with a married couple who so desperately desires a child, but the discussion of the life choices that lead so many couples of advanced age to desire to have children now, rather than earlier, are culturally off-limits.

And the birth of Zachary Jackson Levon Furnish-John to an aging pop singer and his same-sex partner is just a sign of things to come. The question, “Where did I come from?” may well emerge as one of the most haunting questions of our times.

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I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at [mail@albertmohler.com](mailto:mail@albertmohler.com). Follow regular updates on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler](http://www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler).

Melanie Thernstrom, “[Meet the Twiblings](#),” *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, January 2, 2011.

Zoe Williams, “[Rejoice at Elton’s News. And that Homophobia is Dying](#),” *The Guardian* [London], Thursday, December 30, 2010.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “[The Global Scandal of ‘The Global Baby’](#)” Thursday, December 16, 2010.

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