

'Is implantation the biological event which completes conception, and so separates conception from induced abortion? A personal position paper

Some thoughts, for consideration by Christians, but also those of any faith who would call themselves theists¹.

Given that those scientists of the 19th Century who said they were "thinking God's thoughts after him" were believers: how should theists today 'think his thoughts' about the earliest stages of human reproduction. Biologically, we now know so much more about CON-CEPTION (a word whose etymology is 'being with child'). But theologically these are uncharted waters. I suggest we start from the 'chart' provided by normal God-ordained events *in vivo*.

After fertilization there is cell division/cleavage to produce a blastocyst (a cystic structure forming a tiny fluid-filled filled sac). This reaches the uterus and begins to implant no earlier than 5 days after fertilization. If it implants successfully, its secretion of human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG) enters the mother's bloodstream and prevents the otherwise inevitable failure of the corpus luteum, and the resultant loss of the blastocyst in the next menstrual flow.

- ◆ So what is the status of the unimplanted blastocyst? Clearly while it is free in the uterine cavity it still has 100 % "NO GO" status. It is a certainty that in a few days it will be flushed through the cervix and vagina in a gush of endometrial debris and blood.

This no go status only changes to "go" after implantation allows the magic signal of hCG to get back in the mother's bloodstream to the active ovary. This tells its corpus luteum to continue to produce essential estrogen and progesterone, and so stop the blastocyst being flushed away through the cervix. Until then it has no more chance of life than the particular sperm and egg that made it, about 5 days earlier, in the tube. (Thereafter it has about an 80 % chance of making it to term).

- ◆ Until then also there is no proper two-way RELATIONSHIP with the mother.
- ◆ Thirdly, best estimates suggest that up to 50% of blastocysts do in fact fail to implant, naturally. Now most theists believe that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Does he not, surely, also have (and I say this reverently) "omni-common sense"? How likely is it that a God with that attribute as well as the other "omnis", would expect us to give the status, importance and respect to this entity, with which Nature is so prodigal, as is rightly given after implantation? – when there is a relationship with the mother and for the first time there are above-zero prospects of going on to term.

From these considerations one can write an equation to define the *process* of conception, as follows:

CONCEPTION = FERTILIZATION (certainly crucial) + IMPLANTATION (also crucial)
[Being "with child"]

Before implantation there is no true "carriage": so how can it be "procuring a miscarriage" (ie abortion), as some theists allege, to use:

- ◆ the emergency pill [NB never after that crucial event] or
- ◆ intrauterine devices and systems, long term, or
- ◆ old-style progestogen-only pills (non-desogestrel POPs) IF the woman is not fully breastfeeding (since if she is, this question does not arise as the LAM method makes any POP a fully anovulant method)?

Even though all of these may have anti-implantation effects, as *back-up mechanisms of action* to their main anti-fertilization effects in either blocking sperm function or ovulation.

Note that **those who accept this interpretation can agree wholeheartedly, as I do, that “life begins at conception”**. But we understand that word as NOT being synonymous with fertilization (alone). We are willing to classify as family planning methods those that might sometimes block implantation, as *the event that completes the conception process*.

Postscript:

- Moreover, in sustained use of methods like the most effective modern **banded** copper IUDs, or the levonorgestrel (LNG) intrauterine systems, the anti-fertilization effects of the copper (toxic to sperm) and of the LNG (preventing sperm-penetrability of the cervico-uterine fluid) are sufficiently strong that the back-up mechanisms which stop implantation are entirely *capable of never needing to be utilized, in an individual case, despite years of use*. **Some in Faith communities who do not share my view, represented by the equation above, have nevertheless felt free to use such a method long term, when backed by prayer to their God that in their case it would in fact *always* (rather than *very nearly always*) operate before fertilization.**

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1 Further discussion of these issues (with references) is in the article paired with this, also by John Guillebaud, entitled: ***How do contraceptives work (11)***

This is available at www.ecotimecapsule.com/pagecontents/pdfs/contraception/article4b.pdf