

Surrogacy: a letter to the Scottish nation?

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Abstract. How old is the distinction between the genetic and the gestational parent? Anca Gheaus “suggests” it is quite new, but I believe people have made a distinction along these lines for centuries in their imaginations. I present a problem related to the distinction and to the Scottish enlightenment.

In one of her papers, Anca Gheaus tells us about a distinction, one that she “suggests” is quite new:

Usually, we use the term ‘biological parent’ to mean ‘genetic parent’.

Here I distinguish between two ways in which one can be a biological parent, or procreator: by being the genetic procreator, or by being the gestational procreator of the child... Until recently, it was easy to ignore this distinction between two ways of being a biological procreator: gestational procreators were always one of the two genetic procreators of the child, so the distinction did not have much practical relevance. (Gheaus 2018: 225-26)

I am going to assume here, for the sake of argument, that there is not much practical relevance in making the distinction.¹ Nevertheless, perhaps some people of a more theoretical orientation made the distinction, or one along the same lines.

They might have considered the following problem:

¹ “Once upon a time, mothers were mothers and fathers were fathers and nobody thought to make these distinctions!” Would not some people have conceived a “better” system in broad outline, if not in detail, for practical reasons? See “Almost Forgotten Myths about Daedalus” (?) or else Malinowski 1927: 20.

- (a) Greater division of labour is the mark of a more civilized nation (see West 1983: 163).
- (b) God is the most civilized of beings.
- (c) It was possible for Him to introduce a greater division of labour regarding conception and gestation.

If earlier generations did not formulate this problem, I think some earlier philosophers would have noticed the natural division of labour, or lack of it, and reflected on the matter. I imagine proposing this problem centuries ago and then failing examinations for not referring to primary literature in relation to (a), ignoring challenging Biblical passages in relation to (b), and not elaborating sufficiently on (c). I confess I found it somewhat difficult to attend to other things in Gheaus's paper after getting wrapped up in the material quoted and that looks a case of being distracted.

References

- Gheaus, A. 2018. Biological Parenthood: Gestational, Not Genetic. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96 (2): 225-240.
- Malinowski, B. 1927. *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Company.
- West, E.G. 1983 (originally 1964). Adam Smith's Two Views on the Division of Labour. In J.C. Wood (ed.), *Adam Smith: Critical Assessments* Volume III. London and Canberra: Croom Helm.