A rational cure for prereproductive stress syndrome—a perspective(1,7),(997,989) from Israel: a rejoinder to Häyry, Bennet, Holm, and Aksoy

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In a recent article Matty Häyry observes that human reproduction is both irrational and immoral; hence, he suggests, those who seek help before conceiving, “could be advised it is all right not to have children”. Häyry believes that if prospective parents are told that “according to at least one philosopher it would be all right not to reproduce at all” this could empower people “to make the rational choice to remain childless”; valiantly, he suggests himself as “the one philosopher to be blamed for this unpopular idea”.

In a rejoinder to Matty Häyry, Søren Holm claims it is not strongly irrational to have children; S Aksoy contends that having children is the biggest dream of many married couples, and “the major goal in a couple’s life”; Rebecca Bennet, accepts that human reproduction may be irrational but in most cases she thinks this is morally defensible.

Matty Häyry does not need my help to defend himself: I will argue here, however, that while each of the rejoinders make good arguments against Häyry’s proposal, they fail to recognise that the crux of the matter in Häyry’s article is that in the present social environment, fully empowered by an aggressive marketing of artificial reproduction technologies (RTs), the pressure to procreate makes choice, in the majority of cases, less than fully autonomous; moreover, this pressure to procreate as a non-choice mostly (but not only) affects women.

STATE OF THE RTS: THE ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE

Häyry’s proposal might be better understood from the perspective of RTs in Israel. Israel has now the largest number of fertility clinics per head of population in the world. A woman in Israel can have up to two children using in vitro fertilisation (IVF); she may use as many IVF cycles as it takes to have a child—even if she has children already. In vitro fertilisation treatment is fully covered by the national health insurance in Israel; and this is the case for all women, including single mothers and/or lesbians. In addition, Israel was the first country to make surrogacy legal. Finally, I believe Aksoy’s approach of preferring “to be interestingly wrong rather than being boringly right” while dealing with infertility trouble, is an insult to all women undergoing IVF. Being “right” might not be particularly exciting for Aksoy and colleagues; yet for too many women it may prove to be healthier.

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Abbreviations: IVF, in vitro fertilisation; RT, reproduction technology
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