James Mumford

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I

‘Verbum infans. The Word without a word; the eternal word not able to speak a word’. On Christmas Day 1618 Bishop Lancelot Andrewes preached before James I. The text he chose was Luke 2:12: ‘And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger’.

In an essay on Lancelot Andrewes in 1926 T.S. Eliot hailed ‘The Word without a word’ as ‘one of those flashing phrases [which] never desert the memory’. Eliot, ever the kleptomaniac, twice ‘utilized’ that flashing phrase himself, once before his conversion of 1927, once after. In his poem of 1920, ‘Gerontion’, we read:

Signs are taken for wonders. “We would see a sign”:
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness.

And then in Ash Wednesday (1930):

The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world
And the light shone in the darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.

What aspect of the incarnation was it that so struck Lancelot Andrewes, and T.S. Eliot after him? It was the form of God’s appearing: as a baby, as a child. The one sent not only to redeem mankind – not only! – but to reveal Godself (a task only he could accomplish given that only God can reveal God) – that he could not in the beginning speak a word. The self-communicating God wailing in a manger (‘no crying he made’ I have always dismissed as Gnostic heresy). The envoy with no message. The great revealer unable yet to reveal. The Word now within the world, yet unable to speak a word. The main character in the nativity had a non-speaking part.

Why though, we might ask, given Lancelot Andrewes’s preoccupation with the manner of the appearing of the logos did he not choose that Christmas to preach on John 1:14?

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Why select Luke 2:12 if so seized by the phenomenon of ‘the eternal word not able to speak a word’? Or, if it was the other way round, why was Andrewes’s profound meditation prompted by the Lukan and not the Johannine text? The answer, I think, lies in the fact that the Lucan text concentrates on the fact that if you are looking for how God chooses ultimately to reveal Godself ‘ye shall find [a] babe’.

When we are talking about the incarnation, probably because we usually do so at Christmas, we are so used automatically to conflating ‘the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us’ with ‘the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger’. But would the original readers of John’s gospel, if they only had John’s gospel, necessarily have assumed that God’s taking on flesh meant his being born? Would they have assumed that his second Adam was not also drawn up from the dust – immediately an adult, able to
minister in all power and authority from his terrestrial outset, able from the beginning to reveal Godself in the way only he as the second person of the triune God could? Would they have assumed something more like the transfiguration, or ‘walking in the midst of the fire’, in King Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace, ‘the appearance of the fourth like a son of the Gods’ (Dan. 3:25)? We are not permitted to entertain counterfactuals. But if we were: if we had only been told that the Word was made flesh would we know that the Word was made the flesh of an infant, that he existed in a state of radical dependency, that he had subsisted for a time ‘as a word unable to speak a word’?

Bishop Andrewes supplies another clue as to why he took Luke 2 for his text. He goes on in his nativity sermon of 1618 to expound a dense but fine metaphor from Job 38, from the extraordinary passage in which the Lord counters Job’s questioning with, ‘Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?’

God speaks of the finely-tuned, ordered world he brought into being – whose foundations he fastened and whose corner-stone he laid. He speaks of having held back the elemental forces in order to bring order out of chaos. Then he employs this epic metaphor:

[Who] shut up the sea, when it burst forth from the womb / 
When I made the clouds its garments and thick darkness its swaddling clothes? 
(Job 38:8-9)

The meaning of the metaphor seems to be this: the ocean is pictured, like the deep over which the Spirit hovers in Genesis 1:1, as a destructive elemental force, which issues from the womb of chaos like the liquor amni and a newly-born infant. God then makes the clouds into ‘swaddling clothes’ to receive the infant, to nurse the child.

The way Lancelot Andrewes picks up ‘swaddling clothes’, then, is profound. Jesus Christ, ‘the one through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made that has been made’ (John 1:30); Jesus Christ, ‘by whom all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities’ (Col. 1:16); the one who wrapped the forces of chaos in swaddling clothes now lies himself in swaddling clothes. To this babe we will return.

I have two aims in this paper. The first part of the paper attempts to view through a Christological lens my previous work – a phenomenological investigation of human ‘emergence’ (not in the sense of human ‘evolution’ but in terms of how individuals come forth in the world). This phenomenological description led to sustained reflection, inter alia, of the radical dependency which characterizes the way in which we appear in the world. Given this crucial feature of our becoming admits of different evaluations, I assess here how the distinctive Christological evaluation we find in the incarnation breaks with evaluations prevalent in both antiquity and modernity. My second aim in the paper is to revisit the anthropological significance of the Nicene Creed’s proclamation that Jesus Christ was ‘begotten not made’. I argue that the recent generation of theological ethicists who have drawn upon this distinction made a significant mistake when they deployed it solely to highlight what they considered intrinsically immoral about artificial reproduction. Their mistake was to miss the opportunity to identify a prior predicament: the mischaracterization in late modernity of the natural as the artificial, of ‘normal’ begetting in contradistinction to making.
'Back to the things themselves' was the rallying-cry with which Edmund Husserl launched the philosophical movement which is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a method of philosophical inquiry which aspires to universality whilst at the same time, as Merleau-Ponty puts it in his famous preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, seeking to offer 'an account of space, time and the world as we "live" them'. On the one hand, phenomenology seeks to be a rigorous science; on the other, it refuses to abstract from the world, remaining radically subjective. ‘All my knowledge of the world’, as Merleau-Ponty stipulates, ‘is gained from my own particular point-of-view’. The contemporary French phenomenologist Jean-Yves Lacoste captures well the goal of phenomenology:

Phenomenology favours the naïve, the way things look to us before we reach a judgment on them. It would like to recover whatever is immediately evident to consciousness as it wakes up and looks around it. And even if the best phenomenology can actually do is to imitate this moment of awakening, so that it is really a re-awakening, we must admit, at any rate, that there is nothing out of order in wanting to let things appear as they do appear.

My aim here is to describe the way ‘birth’ or human beginning looks to us before we reach a judgment on it, to look afresh at features of our becoming as if we were seeing them for the first time, before we proceed to evaluations of these features or reflecting upon their normative implications.

It may seem that adopting phenomenology is a singularly unpromising method for exploring the reality of birth. For has not phenomenology historically been far more interested in death than in birth? Heidegger refers to the phenomenon of birth only twice in the whole of *Being and Time*, and on both occasions the latter pole overwhelms the former. For example, ‘factual Dasein exists as born; and, as born, it is already dying, in the sense of Being-towards-death’. No sooner is our beginning mentioned than it is subsumed into our end. Nevertheless, as I contest in my book *Ethics at the Beginning of Life: A Phenomenological Critique*, phenomenology does in fact provide unique insight when applied to the region of being which is Dasein’s becoming.

For instance, in a key section of the introduction to *Being and Time* entitled ‘The Concept of Phenomenon’, Heidegger observes how one of the ways that phenomena can appear is by way of symptoms. He argues:

Here one has in mind certain occurrences in the body which show themselves and which, in showing themselves as thus showing themselves, ‘indicate’ something which does not show itself. (§7, 52)

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3 Ibid, p. ix.
Applied to pregnancy, a woman might view her missed period or morning sickness as advance warnings of the arrival of the ‘newone’ (my nomenclature for the prenatal human organism). Heidegger is even prepared to call these symptoms ‘semblances’ since ‘it is possible for an entity to show itself as something which in itself it is not’ (§7, 51). In the case of morning sickness, the appearance of the baby is at first indistinguishable from illness and therefore ‘something which in itself it is not’. Only over time, only because being is ‘made visible in its temporal character’ and ‘cannot be grasped except by taking time into consideration’ (§5, 40) will a mother be able to tell she is not suffering from an illness but that she is with child. Only if we ‘eschew the ‘naivete of a haphazard, “immediate”, and unreflective, beholding’ (§7, 61) will a woman arrive at an awareness of what is in fact the case: that she is a mother.

Furthermore, phenomenology highlights something special about the arrival of the newone: its unavailability. ‘A woman who is expecting cannot make the body inside her own body appear (in order to gain more adequate perception of it) without violating its existence’. At a particular moment in its ‘arrival’, ‘as it is in its current embryonic or foetal state, to see this object whole would require its premature delivery. ‘Untimely ripped’, it would not appear because it would no longer be’.

Heidegger’s preoccupation with temporality invaluably aids any effort to ‘arrive where we started and know the place for the first time’, as if we were beholding a phenomenon, procreation, we had never seen before. Nevertheless, as I argue at length in my book, the anomaly of Being and Time is that the philosopher who sought to reformulate the question of who we are under the concept of ‘being-in-the-world’, and whose overhauling of the Cartesian subject resulted in an affirmation of the social dimension of human existence, never traced a trail back to the philosophical significance of kinship. So, Geworfenheit, or ‘thrownness’ is the central motif of Heidegger’s text – the motif which captures the essential contingency of Dasein’s existence in the world, the fundamental fortuitousness that frames Dasein’s agency. And whither are we thrown? Heidegger could not be clearer:

In clarifying Being-in-the-world we have shown that a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated ‘I’ without Others is just as far as from being proximally given (§25, 152).

Yet about these Others Heidegger will tell us little. Our interactions with them he will confine to the realm of a kind of pre-ethical care or ‘bothering-about’ (Fürsorge). But he will tell us little more. We look in vain in his text for duties or rights, loves or hates. Accounts of intersubjectivity are woefully underdetermined. More ominously, as Jean-Luc Nancy has observed, when these Others resolve into a people who grasp hold of their historic destiny, it is not out of place to identify an intellectual anticipation of Heidegger’s famous complicity in Nazism.

Whatever the case, what puzzles me – this is the anomaly – is why, if Heidegger is so adamant that ‘a bare subject without a world never “is”’, that thought never leads him to question how this subject makes her entrance into the world. My concern is the glaring lacunae in phenomenology more generally about the relationships from which human beings take their life; the fact that the first generation of pioneering German and French phenomenologists have had next to nothing to say about the fact that ‘we live in a world where... our bodies have been conceived and grown in the bodies of others, and our

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children have grown in our own bodies’. But it is here that feminist phenomenologists have stepped in to fill the void. My book draws upon the work of a number of these scholars. There is space in this paper to cite only one, though perhaps the most important. In *Sharing the World*, Luce Irigaray radicalizes Heidegger’s Dasein-analytik to reflect upon this double reality. First, we arrive in the world connected to one person in particular. Our mother is ‘she who has been the company and the mediator of our first being in the world’.

Secondly, this constitutes ‘the most natural and basic bond of dependence’. We deceive ourselves, Irigaray writes, if we (and particularly if ‘man’) allow(s) ourselves/himself to forget ‘the help that has been given to us in order to enter into this world’. The ‘original encounter’, as we might call it, is both radically particular and radically asymmetrical.

But there is more. For in the felicitous phrase of Hans Jonas (another student of Heidegger’s), ‘the radical insufficiency of the begotten’ characterizes not just the state of the newone but also that of the infant after birth. More than many other mammals the human being remains reliant on its mother or, in her absence, its father, or the shepherd who picked baby Oedipus off Mount Ida, the she-wolf who reared Mowgli. The human being, unlike the foal, the piglet, the calf, does not clamber quickly to the level of the adult members of its kind. The human being does not grow up rapidly but remains in a state of radical dependency, vulnerability, fragility – not that much stronger or more self-sufficient than it was *in utero*. This is a phenomenon which must be contended with.

III

Jean-Yves Lacoste, as we saw, introduced phenomenology as a manner or style of thinking which ‘favours the naïve, the way things look to us *before we reach a judgment on them*. Well, now the time has come for judgment, because the phenomenon of our initial vulnerability, the fragility which characterizes our entrance into the world, is one which admits of divergent evaluations.

In antiquity we find an intriguing passage in his *Natural History* when Pliny the Elder betrays his own view of the phenomenon of initial human appearing:

> But man alone on the day of his birth Nature casts away naked on the naked ground, to burst at once into wailing and weeping, and none among all the animals is more prone to tears, and that immediately at the very beginning of life… This initiation into the light is followed by a period of bondage such as befalls not even the animals bred in our midst, fettering all his limbs; and thus when successfully born he lies with hands and feet in shackles, weeping – the animal that is to lord it over all the rest.14

This was not the attitude of an idiosyncratic stoic. Pliny’s disdain for the human being’s initial ‘period of bondage’ became, in Greco-Roman culture, the condition for the possibility of practices like exposure. The abandonment of unwanted infants reflects the belief that it was only when dependency was overcome that life becomes valuable and worthy of protection.

12 Ibid, 156.
13 Ibid, 117.
Fast forward to the first stirrings of modernity and what we find is the resurrection of the Stoic ideal of autarkia in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous manual for education, Émile. What was the chief ideal teachers should set out for their students? Self-reliance. Keeping the child dependent on things and not people is imperative, Rousseau advises. Why? Because ‘each of us, unable to dispense with the help of others, becomes so far weak and wretched.’ Once again, this valorization of autonomy comes to be concretized in practices. Most dramatically, when Western societies in the late twentieth-century selected viability as the compelling point after which the interests of the newone were to be taken into consideration, they were essentially choosing what they saw as the first fruits of autonomy, the first signs that a newone could exist independently of its maternal host. This may have been a legal fiction. In Roe v. Wade Justice Blackmun added a revealing qualification to his definition of viability. It is, he said, the point at which a foetus becomes potentially able to live outside the mother’s womb, (albeit with artificial aid). A neonate is no more viable than a newone. But that is not the point. The very fact that being, in Rousseau’s terms, ‘unable to dispense with the help of others’ serves as a moral exemption, reveals the negative evaluation of the radical dependence in which all of us have entered the world.

Having overcome dependence, according to the Stoic vision resurrected in modernity, human beings do not necessarily live the lives of hermits. They are not monadic. It is just that they prefer to engage each other from positions of strength. Because implied in verdict on man’s initial state is a picture of human flourishing, of what it means to make a success of life, according to which human beings seek community because they want to, not because they need to. They form contracts because it benefits them; because they profit from it. But they know nothing of natural sociality. They engage on their own terms.

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Having (i) first allowed a phenomenological investigation to illuminate the radical dependence which characterizes our entrance into the world; and then (ii) having surveyed the negative verdicts delivered upon that condition in both antiquity and modernity; we are now in a position (iii) to return to the incarnation, the creator who wrapped the elemental forces in swaddling-clothes now himself lying in swaddling-clothes.

One of the central questions of this consultation on birth, as you nicely frame it, is ‘how does the birth of Christ, understood as the Word become flesh, bear upon the fact of human birth?’ Our answer need not be convoluted: the incarnation is God’s Yes to the radical dependency that characterizes the entrance of human beings into the world.

‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son’ (Isaiah 7:14). And then: ‘Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son’ (Luke 1:30-1). Luke informs us that, immediately following the annunciation, Mary sets out to visit her relative Elizabeth (it is the book of Matthew alone which speaks of Joseph). Upon arrival, even before Mary can divulge the news, Luke tells us that ‘when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb’ [John, in Elizabeth’s womb, that is]. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb’ (Luke 1:42). Because as John Donne will put it, here was ‘immensity

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cloistered in thy dear womb.' Hans Urs von Balthasar remarks on this passage: ‘Later the Baptist will at first not know who the Greater One to come after him is (Jn 1:33 “I knew him not”), yet here, already in his mother’s womb, he is blessed by this Greater One.’ The cousins are communicating in utero, hailing each other from the depths of the womb.

The incarnation dispels any doubt that neediness of the newborn falls under the scope of the curse of childbirth. It is this not this phenomenon of which YHWH speaks so darkly in Genesis 3:16. The incarnation reveals that ‘the radical insufficiency of the begotten’ is no predicament. It is no function of the fall.

For the New Testament as well as for patristic authors the incarnation of Christ was, of course, the necessary and sufficient condition of the redemption of humanity. ‘But when the fullness of the time was come’, the apostle Paul narrates in Galatians, ‘God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons’ (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ assumes sinful flesh in order to sanctify it for the reason that, as Gregory of Nazianzus insisted, ‘the unassumed is the unredeemed’.

But what of anthropology, though, particularly given the proclivity of Gnosticism to gnaw away at the legitimacy of the human? In short, because in its affirmation of life, of being, of human existence, what comes into view is a notion of incarnation-as-legitimation. And what is the kind of life that the incarnation legitimates?

It is here that Christ’s beginning is ordered to his end, or his full flourishing as a human being. For in what form does the word-made-flesh appear? He arrives in the backwater of the world – Israel, an oppressed nation – and in the backwater of a backwater – ‘Can anything good come of Nazareth?’ (John 1:45-46). We are told that the Son of God ‘grows in wisdom and stature’ (Luke 2:40), implying he didn’t automatically have it from the outset, but that that virtue was acquired through relationship. Jesus does not inhabit a monadic nor romantic existence. He arrives as one who is intimately involved in the contingent relational nexus which is work: ‘Is this Joseph the carpenter’s son?’ (Matt. 13:55). He takes the nature of a servant (Phil. 2:7) but shows himself a very good guest, content to be served, to receive as well as to give, happy with the human reality of reciprocity. His life is embedded in the structures of community. Christ chooses disciplines with which to go about his father’s business. His episodes of solitude are of pivotal importance, certainly; but they energize acts of ministry he accomplishes with his fellows. Most importantly of all, there is no doubt that the word-made-flesh wills to need companionship. His need for companionship is not an instance of Jesus’ being, as the author of the Hebrews puts it, ‘tempted in every way’ (Heb. 4:15). It is evidence of his humanity, his being relationally constituted. Thus the poignancy of Jesus’ question to Peter at Gethsemane, ‘could you not watch with me one hour?’ (Matt. 26:40). (A poignancy Shakespeare echoes at the moment Richard II corrects his courtiers: ‘I live with bread like you, feel want, / Taste grief, need friends’). The incarnation demonstrates God’s love and freedom inserted into history in a way that renders dependency and relationality constitutive of human nature. The humanity and creatureliness God affirms is no strong, heroic Übermensch; we find the Son of God with and for his fellows, and fulfilled in his sacrifice for them.

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16 John Donne, ‘Nativity’ from La Corona (1610)
18 Shakespeare, Richard II, III.ii.
I now move on to the second part of my paper to resurrect again the analogy the fathers of the Council of Nicaea selected to delineate the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. They used a human analogy to try to describe the immanent trinity and the relationship between its members. In saying the Son of God was ‘begotten not made’ they drew upon the two different ways in which we human beings form things other than ourselves. First, we form a new thing which is like ourselves. We do not determine what this thing is because it shares our being. This is ‘begetting’. Secondly, we form a thing unlike ourselves. We fashion or create something from foreign material – wood or words. It is a product of our will. This is ‘making’. This analogy permitted the fathers at Nicaea a way to hold out for belief a claim that the eternal Son of God was ‘of one being in the father’, having been begotten by him, and not made, not the product of his will created at a moment in time but sharing the same substance.

In what follows I am not going to set out across a metaphysical minefield and explore how a human being’s source of value is related to their form of its existence. To say our offspring ‘share our being’, and to locate their dignity in that reality, is to invoke a natural kind and thus to take sides in one of the organizing contests of Western philosophy. Robert Spaemann has, in the face of nominalism, mediated an interesting position between natural kinds and the ‘individualism’ or ‘haeccitas’ (‘thisness’) nominalists are loath to relinquish. He does this by defining a person as ‘someone who has her nature’. Further exploration of these issues is much needed, and work I intend to undertake in future – including addressing the promise of action theory for procreation. Here, however, I want to offer an historical reflection about how the ‘Begotten or Made’ distinction has been deployed by certain theologians in relation to assisted reproductive technology; and to suggest it could have been deployed earlier to illuminate an important feature of our social imaginary insofar as it relates to procreation.

You will forgive the sentimentality of a former student when I express my frustration that Oliver O’Donovan’s Begotten or Made? is out of print. You literally have to call up OUP and beg them to hand-make you a copy if you want to read it. It is not anthologized and too ‘confessional’ to get away with using in bioethical courses in strictly secular philosophical faculties like UVA’s where I teach. What is interesting from the start to observe about O’Donovan’s thesis is his observations that the fathers at Nicaea were essentially applying a human analogy. Which means that in taking the Christological claim that Jesus is ‘begotten, not made’ we are not simply helping ourselves to a theological analogy, ripping it out of context in applying it to human procreation. O’Donovan is reclaiming for anthropology a distinction, as I have just delineated it, which was used in the fourth century for Trinitarian purposes.

O’Donovan recalled the distinction between begetting and making in the context of theological agonizing over the moral legitimacy of in vitro fertilization, having the occasion to write the original series of lectures which became the book for the London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity in 1983, five years after the birth of the first IVF baby Louise Brown. O’Donovan’s thesis was that IVF constituted the ‘inappropriateness’ of technological intervention in the procreative sphere, presaging an ominous turn from begetting to making, from natural procreation to artificial construction. When an egg and sperm are fertilized in a petri-dish in a laboratory and

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21 See the preface to Begotten or Made?, pps. v-ix.
then that fertilized egg is implanted in a woman’s womb, that intrinsic act constitutes a shift from ‘begetting’ as a form of creation to ‘making’.

In 2006 an essay entitled, ‘Begotten, Not Made’, by the German moral philosopher, Robert Spaemann was translated in the American Catholic journal Communio. A professor at the University of Munich, Pope Benedict XVI’s favorite philosopher (their acquaintance dated back to Benedict’s stint as Archbishop of Munich), Spaemann’s reputation in Europe and on the Continent is significant, though his work has not as of yet received the reception it deserves in the English-speaking world. Spaemann’s essay, written without knowledge of O’Donovan’s book, draws upon the ‘Begotten, not made’ distinction to assail the specter of genetic manipulation. ‘Begotten, not made’, Spaemann contends, ‘holds true for every origin of a human being that is worthy of a human being, even of those human beings who don’t believe in anything like a son of God’. The idea of parents selecting the individual characteristics of their offspring would – at the level of act-analysis – would constitute a step from begetting to making, in so doing destroying ‘what binds us to our children: the shared naturalness of our genesis’.

If ‘making’ designates for O’Donovan in vitro fertilization, and for Spaemann enhancement, then for American Lutheran theological ethicist Gilbert Meilander it is cloning. In 1997, a year after the birth of Dolly the sheep, the first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell, Meilaender gave a speech before the National Bioethics Advisory Commission. (This was President Clinton’s bioethics committee. The one which followed, George W. Bush’s President Council on Bioethics, Meilaender himself served on from 2002-2009). In 1997, in the midst of the furor over cloning, before a secular public policy committee Meilaender unapologetically drew upon the ‘begotten, not made’ distinction. The formulation of the Nicene Creed, he stressed, was intended ‘to assert an equality of being’, the moral significance of which, when it comes to having children, is that ‘what we beget is like ourselves’, such that ‘we are not at each other’s disposal’, whereas ‘what we make is not’. What we make ‘is the product of our free decision, and its destiny is ours to determine’. Meilaender then concludes that cloning ‘decisively... sets aside’ the way of bringing children into the world which is begetting. Be not mistaken: the moment we start cloning human beings we would have moved into the territory of ‘making’.

IVF, enhancement, cloning: occasion demanded these theological ethicists think deeply about what it is that distinguishes, and problematically so, assisted reproduction from natural procreation. ‘Begotten, not made’ supplied the distinction adequate to that critical purpose. But in deploying this distinction to address urgent challenges and pressing problems thrown up by the latest biotechnological developments – whether ones already realized like IVF or ones which seemed to loom on the horizon like enhancement or cloning – those theological ethicists, in my view, lamentably confined their analysis and missed the opportunity to launch a far broader critique of technological culture in late modernity. They fell into the occupational hazard of bioethics, whether secular or theological – being so preoccupied with or pressured by the task of responding to the latest apocalyptic worry that one fails to recognize how such and such a novel development has arisen in a specific culture.

23 Ibid, p. 292.
25 Meilaender’s testimony was given on March 13, 1997. His remarks were published in First Things in an article entitled ‘Begetting and Cloning’ in June 1997 (accessed via: http://www.firstthings.com/article/1997/06/005-begetting-and-cloning [accessed on 10/13/15])
‘Begotten, not made’ allowed O’Donovan, Spaemann and Meilaender to pick out what made assisted reproduction distinct from natural procreation. Their application of ‘Begotten, or Made’ was not inaccurate; it was too narrow. Rushing to apply the distinction to artificial reproduction, they skated over the momentous changes in the deep structures of contemporary culture according to which the meaning of procreation had been transformed. For long before we reach the introduction of assisted reproductive technologies does not the ‘making’ designation uniquely capture how both individuals and institutions, both parents and medicine, have come to misconstrue the practice of procreation? Does not the Nicene distinction uniquely capture how a technological culture has led to the mischaracterization of ‘begetting’ as ‘making’?

To give him credit, in the opening chapter of Begotten or Made, ‘Medicine and the Liberal Revolution’, O’Donovan did swivel round to observe the technological character of contemporary culture. With cursory nods to Jacques Ellul and George Grant, he observes that a technological society is not defined merely by the sophistication of its instrumentations of technique but how it thinks about everything in terms of making. But O’Donovan analysis was truncated; these critical comments set him up to highlight how IVF constituted the inevitable penetration of technology into the most intimate sphere of all – begetting, the generation of our offspring. But what about the prior reconceptualization of begetting as making? May we not permit ourselves to ask: Had the technological mindset not already infiltrated the procreative sphere?

Language, as always, is revealing. What is the most common term for procreation in our culture? ‘Reproduction’. Fertility clinics we call ‘Centers For Reproductive Medicine’. Following the tragic, premature death of the main bioethics professor in UVA’s philosophy department, the syllabus I was handed to teach half way through last semester was titled ‘The Ethics of Reproductive Medicine’ (a course title I have not been permitted to change even as I become the main instructor). At the beginning of his bestselling book, Far From The Tree, New York Times journalist Andrew Solomon tells us that ‘when two people decide to have a baby, they engage in an act of production’. Or consult the obstetrics and gynecology chapter of an undergraduate medical textbook and you’ll find the fetus described as ‘the product of conception’.

There was an article in The Atlantic last year about in vitro fertilization entitled ‘Making Babies’. But ‘making babies’ was how we described the natural phenomenon of procreation long before we used it to refer it to artificial reproduction. Long before the infertility industry had turned to the artificial (i.e. IVF), we had already re-conceptualized the natural as the artificial.

So too, when it comes to the bioethical literature. We do not have to wait for deliberations on assisted reproductive technology, and debates on the limits of reproductive autonomy, for a model of procreation as ‘making’. ‘Wrongful Life: Paradoxes in the Morality of Causing People to Exist’ – the title of one anthologized essay by prominent bioethicist Jeff McMahan. Or the ubiquitous designation of ‘existence-inducing conduct’ for sexual intercourse. The model of agency for natural procreation – again, we are not talking about artificial reproductive technology – is completely causal, entirely determinative. All contingency has fallen out. The picture has become one of manufacture. A temporal biological movement, one with its own integrity resistant to efficiency – i.e. you can’t speed up a pregnancy, the child will take its own sweet time to arrive – is being reimagined as a process. Gestation is being pictured as a product moving

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down an assembly-line towards us. It arrives in the light of day, appearing in all regularity, governed by a strict logic of strict cause and effect. So, a designer creates an object in his studio and sends blueprints to a factory where, from a variety of materials and using a range of machinery, it is manufactured. Its arrival is ‘expected,’ and the predictability of the technological object, ‘the perfect the foreseeability of the product induced on the basis of its ‘concept’, permits (or demands) the product’s repetition.”^28

Thus if the conveyor belt disrupts and one of the items it is bringing forth falls off and breaks, the production of a replacement is easily arranged. For products are repeatable, uniform, interchangeable and, therefore, disposable. The maker is the causal agent and the artifact he makes is of different material from himself: that is the fiction being entertained.

What we face, then, are unprecedented historical changes in the frameworks of meaning and moral order regarding human emergence in the world. Which also means we cannot avoid the conclusion that we are dealing a profound cultural self-_. If we accept this central contention, that – in such a fundamental way – begetting has been misconstrued as making, the onus then lies on us to find a genealogical account to explain the rise of this distinct social imaginary. Critical Theory’s critique of technology is, I believe, adequate to that task.

Critical Theory’s critique of technology never stretched as far as thinking through the implication of the intrusion of the technological into the sphere of the procreative. But it has the resources, I believe, to explain the tectonic shifts which had to happen for begetting to be misconstrued as making.

The Frankfurt School is looked back upon as the leading school of Western Marxism in the mid-twentieth century. But it has a very strange history, the circumstances of its survival being so contingent. First founded in 1923 as the Institute for Social Research, the eclectic group of left-wing Jewish scholars fled Germany for the United States in 1933. But despite being well-connected in left-wing American intellectual circles in New York, even what is now the school’s most celebrated work – Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1947] languished in obscurity – until it became famous by association when a later member of the school, Herbert Marcuse, found himself, again by accident, a celebrity of the New Left in the 1960s.^29

A number of factors positioned the Frankfurt School for its perspicuous cultural analysis of the emergence of a technological society. Established in 1923, five years after the Russian Revolution and one year before Lenin’s death and Stalin’s assumption of power, the communist revolution had not happened _where_ it was supposed to have happened – Germany (the country of these intellectuals’ origin) – _or when_, after a feudal order gave way to a capitalism that collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions (Russia bypassed the capitalist era). So breaking free, often painfully, from conventional Marxist analysis, the Institute’s first director, Carl Grünberg, set the organization the task of, broadly, interrogating contemporary society, as he put it, ‘social life in its ceaseless and

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^29 When it was first published, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was hardly noticed. It sold only 2,000 copies. The work of the Frankfurt School in the English-speaking world remained, despite their exile to America, largely unknown. So, though the Institute was founded in 1923, exiled to America in 1933, and then returned to Germany in 1950, it was not until the 1960s that the Frankfurt School first became to public consciousness as Marcuse, almost by mistake, strode out of the shadows – or, more accurately, was pulled out of the shadows – to become the doyen or guru of the New Left. In 1964 he published *One-Dimensional Man* at the age of 66, which threw him into the political limelight, selling 100,000 copies in the next five years in the U.S. alone.
ever-recurring transformations’. Instead of seeing culture as epiphenomenal to the economic, the leading members of the School, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Pollock, Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, Franz Neumann, Erich Fromm the psychologist, Herbert Marcuse, analyzed aspects of modern Western culture on their own terms, turning their attention to the links between mass culture, Nazism and authoritarianism, literary and musical trends, the rise of bureaucracy and the changing structure of the family.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, crucially, the turn to culture allowed them to take as their target modernity rather than capitalism. The latter became a sub-category of the former. Thus Dialectic of Enlightenment. Their critique, often dismissed as excessively pessimistic despite how famous a piece of social philosophy it became—recall that they were Jews writing in the middle of their society’s attempt to exterminate their race by technological means—entailed an attempt to identify a specifically technological dialectic unfolding in modernity. Their narrative was one in which scientific/technical breakthroughs – i.e. concrete advances in the practical possibilities on offer to mankind – led to paradigm-shifts, the shaping of mindsets and outlooks, which then act backed, causing the natural world to be conceived as but raw material for future technological enterprises. This technological dialectic subtly interwove the idealist and materialistic strands. It was neither purely Hegelian – the systematization across time of various discrete conceptualizations of the technical; nor crudely Marxist, whereby history was propelled only by downstream disruptions caused by technological progress.

It is worth turning to the opening pages of Dialectic of Enlightenment to see how Horkheimer and Adorno set up their analysis. They begin by tracing the technological dialectic to its source, the ‘father of experimental philosophy’ – Francis Bacon. They offer an extended quotation from New Organon where Bacon derides the ‘masters of tradition’ and, with palpable euphoria, hails three game-changing technological inventions of his era. First, he says, printing has transformed the state of learning. Secondly, after the development of artillery war will never be the same. Thirdly, the invention of the needle (i.e. the compass) has opened up staggering new possibilities in terms of transport, not least the possibility of acquiring foreign commodities. ‘What a change’, Bacon exclaims, ‘have these three things made in the world in these times’.

What Adorno and Horkheimer hone in on is that these technological advances immediately inculcate a new mentality for Bacon, a new way of seeing; a new framework for apprehending the world, nature and the opportunities it affords. They include within their lengthy opening quotation from Bacon, his establishment of the central program and great promise of the Enlightenment. ‘The sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge, wherein many things are reserved’. This knowledge is a power which knows no obstacles, Adorno and Horkheimer insist, and – in case there was any doubt – ‘technology is the essence of this power’. This is because, in their view, ‘the many things’ hid in knowledge are instrumental things, i.e. things to control nature. In short, what Adorno and Horkheimer are tracing is precisely technological rationality’s unfolding across time, via the pull and counter-pull which constitutes ‘dialectic’. So, first, for Bacon astonishing

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31 ‘The Frankfurt School’ is synonymous with ‘Critical Theory’, despite the latter term being coined only in 1937. ‘Critical’ here designates the self-understood mission of the School, not to build all-encompassing, closed systems but rather to issue pointed, particular critiques. Procedurally, these critiques would be ‘immanent’, insofar as it ‘examined a social system and its ideology on their own terms, but then highlighted how these ideals were in contradiction with the realities of the social system’ (Thomas Wheetland, The Frankfurt School in Exile, p. 159)
technological advances precipitated for him a mindset according to which nature becomes resource for further human projects. Secondly, this mindset ‘serves the manufacture of other tools’, which can then act back to reinforce the mindset. So here we have it: a deterministic dance, idea and action intertwined, advance and imperative, sweeping forward across the floor of history and ending – as Adorno and Horkheimer believe – in domination and not liberation.

Herbert Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Man restates Dialectic of Enlightenment’s powerful indictment of The Technological Society. The kernel of that critique can be found in Marcuse’s famous sixth chapter:

The science of nature develops under the technological a priori which projects nature as potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organization. And the apprehension of nature as (hypothetical) instrumentality precedes the development of all particular technical organization.33

‘Precedes’ the development of all particular technical organization. In other words, the paradigm comes first. ‘The apprehension of nature as (hypothetical) instrumentality’ comes before the design, invention or bringing on-line of any specific technologies. So when Marcuse later in the book states that ‘technology is a great vehicle of reification’34 he is saying that the ‘technical rationality’ transforms first a way of seeing, tempting us to mistake people for things.

The critical theory of technology identifies the triumph of a certain outlook. ‘Technical rationality’ achieves hegemonic power in democratic capitalist societies for the very reason that it seems to constitute a neutral view of technology whereas actually it is in fact biased. Hegemony also means ubiquity, the pervasiveness of a way-of-seeing. As Marcuse’s student, and a prominent contemporary critical theorist of technology, Andrew Feenberg, puts it: the triumph of ‘technical rationality’ becomes an ‘expansive dynamic’ that ‘restructures the entire social world as an object of control’35 and ‘mediates every pre-technological enclave’. From every kind of labor to corporate management to politics to media to sport to transport to leisure, technology penetrates all zones of social life including – crucially – previously non-technical spheres.36 ‘Critical theory of technology… [shows] that technology is not merely instrumental to specific goals but shapes a way of life’.37

What Critical Theory’s critique of technology illuminates, then, among other things, is that the conquest of nature means the introduction of – or trespassing into? – every sphere of human activity. The enclave which is medicine, the enclave which is the bedroom – critical theory can be faulted for not having paid sufficient attention to these mediations. But what critical theory does do, in particular through its technological dialectic, is highlight how the transformation of a way of seeing can be what it means for technology to have penetrated a zone of social life. Which is precisely why the Frankfurt School provides the genealogical account necessary for the ‘begotten, not made’ distinction to serve as a tool of social criticism in our time.

V

Let me conclude by trying to disguise some of the deficiencies of this paper as avenues for further explorations. A paper about the transformative shift in the social meaning of

33 Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 157
34 Ibid, p. 172.
35 Feenbergy, Critical Theory of Technology, p. 7
36 Feenberg, Critical Theory of Technology
procreation has said nothing about contraception. This is a problem. Technology infiltrates the procreative sphere with the introduction of IVF. Who are you kidding? The Catholic will reply. The question of how the severing of the unitive and the procreative maps onto the distinction between begetting and making is one of cardinal importance, but one I have failed to take on.

Nor will a Roman Catholic likely to be satisfied by what it is about ‘begetting’ that attracts me as a description of procreation. For me, ‘begottenness’ retains a robust notion of agency in procreation, that me and my ‘spousal unit’ (this is a self-consciously patriarchal joke, if you are reading this), that my wife and I perform an act teleologically ordered to the generation of offspring, whose contingent appearance are properly the fruit of our union, testimony to our committed love. ‘Begetting’ holds out a picture of agency according to which I can have some effect over the fact that an entity comes forth but not what that entity is. It will be human by virtue of the fact that I am human. A Roman Catholic faithful to Humane Vitae will contest this, though. They will contest that my agency should any more extend to effect that an entity comes forth any more than it effects what it is that comes forth (what is included in effecting ‘that’ an entity comes forth is, of course, the legitimacy of couples choosing to have children, how many and their attempt to effect the spacing of siblings).

With that aporia acknowledged, I should attempt to tie together in some way the two arguments of this paper. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is God’s ‘Yes’ to the radical dependency which characterizes the way human beings appear in the world. The import of this for how we conceive of human flourishing is it must never be identified with self-sufficiency. Bonhoeffer will tell us that ‘formation occurs only by being drawn into the form (Gestalt) of Jesus Christ, by being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human’. One implication of this is embracing rather than being embarrassed by our need for relationship.

But there are implications which as ethicist as I am cannot overlook, despite the fact that moral considerations, rightly, are not the focus of this consultation. My first claim was that Christology disallows dependency from being construed as deficiency. What follows from that is that dependency can no longer serve as an exemption from the natural obligations which arises between the mother, father, families, communities, institutions and societies and the newone whose presence is for them unwelcome. But this is a negative verdict. It tells us what we can’t do. It is not, properly, action-guiding; not morally instructive. Only when set alongside my second claim in this paper about our genesis as human beings, a claim again uniquely revealed by a Christological formulation — that we are ‘begotten not made’ — do we find positive moral guidance when the dependency exemption has been swept aside. For what we beget participates in our being. Therefore, no matter how dependent upon us he or she may be, and whether perceived as a gift or a burden, the newone enjoys equal status. For a technological culture which has misconstrued begetting as making this epiphany, catalyzed as it is by Christological claims, will come as a shock. But it might also come as a source of hope, as a new picture of what it means to be a human being, and what it means to be a parent. For as Pericles says of his daughter in Shakespeare’s play of that name, ‘Thou that beget’st him that did thee beget’.