

ITALIAN BIOETHICS

Embryo Report Opens Old Wounds

VENICE—A government-appointed bioethics committee is scheduled to present a controversial set of proposals for regulating the manipulation of human embryos to the Italian Parliament this week. The panel's "statute of the embryo" takes a conservative line, stating that life begins at the moment of conception, although it would permit some forms of embryo research and genetic testing. The statute has drawn criticism from former committee members who were removed in late 1994 by then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in what is widely believed to have been a purge of non-Catholics (*Science*, 20 January 1995, p. 326).

According to the statute, the embryo is "a human entity beyond mother and father," to be protected from any manipulation. The document unanimously condemns the production of embryos for uses other than procreation and would bar the freezing of "spare" embryos when many are produced in procedures such as in vitro fertilization. But the panel would permit experimentation on existing frozen embryos that have been stored too long to be implantable or are malformed or diseased. And although some committee

members were uncomfortable with the recommendation, the statute would permit pre-implantation diagnosis for genetic and other diseases, so that affected embryos can be discarded. (Abortion is legal in Italy for some medical or psychological conditions.)

Philosopher Evandro Agazzi of Genoa University, a committee member and editor of the statute, says "There are no significant discontinuities in the [embryo's] development ... what's important is that it deserves to be treated as [a person]." Romano Forleo, a prominent gynecologist at Fatebenefratelli Hospital in Rome, supports the committee's conclusions. "Scientific research should be done on animals, not [human] embryos," he says.

In Italy, however, views on such matters are highly polarized because of the influence of the Catholic Church on politics and society. When Berlusconi dismissed a quarter of the committee's 46 members in 1994, he provoked the resignation of several others, including Nobelist Rita Levi-Montalcini, who were concerned that the pluralist and non-partisan nature of the committee was being destroyed. Former committee member Carlo

Flamigni, head of obstetrics at Bologna University and an expert on artificial insemination, insists that in an embryo's early days, "the tiny differences that do exist define a later phase for the beginning of human life."

Flamigni argues that the beginning of life should be defined as the 14th day after fertilization, when the embryo line appears, marking the first expression of the new person's DNA, and experimentation should be allowed up to that point. In France, a pre-embryo state is considered to last 4 or 5 days, until the onset of paternal genome activity. The United Kingdom and Spain also recognize a pre-embryo phase, but in Germany and Austria life is considered to begin at conception, a conclusion that is already enshrined in law.

The Italian Parliament must now decide whether to legislate on the conclusions of the committee. Many researchers are hoping, however, that the issues first will be given a broader review. As Flamigni said to the daily newspaper *l'Unità* last week, "I really do hope the bioethics committee, handed over by Berlusconi to the Vatican, gets back into the hands of Parliament and the citizen."

—Susan Biggin

Susan Biggin is a writer in Venice, Italy.

SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING

Publisher Draws Censorship Charge

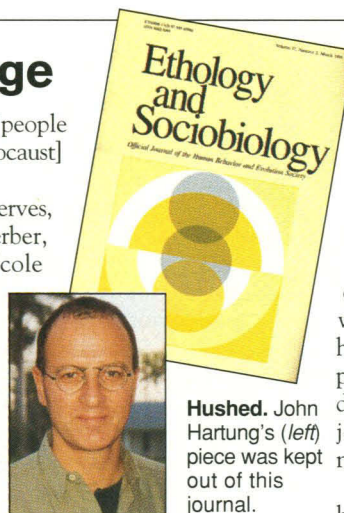
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS—Book reviews in scholarly journals don't usually make much of a splash. But a review published in the journal of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society (HBES) led to charges of anti-Semitism against the author, followed by allegations of censorship against the journal's publisher, which in turn have led to a new publishing contract with a guarantee of editorial independence.

The flap started more than a year and a half ago with the publication of a book by Kevin MacDonald, a psychologist at California State University, Long Beach, entitled *A People that shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy*. MacDonald describes how Judaism has fostered "cultural and natural selection for intelligence and other traits" as well as an insular lifestyle that has made it vulnerable to anti-Semitism. The editors of HBES's journal, *Ethology & Sociobiology*, published by New York-based Elsevier Science Inc., asked John Hartung, an anthropologist, scholar of Jewish history, and professor of anesthesiology at the Health Sciences Center of the State University of New York, Brooklyn, to review the book. His review, published in July 1995, discusses the "in-group morality" of ancient Jews and draws a parallel with modern Israel where Jews, after the Holocaust, have been able "to systematically pur-

loin the land and property of people who were not those [Holocaust] victims' persecutors."

The piece hit some raw nerves, including those of Daniel Sperber, an anthropologist at the École Polytechnique in Paris, who triggered a series of posts last fall on HBES-L, the society's Internet discussion group, in which Hartung was accused of anti-Semitism. Journal editor Michael McGuire, a neuroscientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, suggested that Hartung publish a clarification in the journal. Hartung produced an "addendum" which, says McGuire, everyone thought would calm the waters.

Instead, it stirred up a new controversy. "Elsevier phoned me and said they wouldn't publish it," says McGuire. "They wouldn't let me talk to the decision-maker." Elsevier kept shifting ground, at different times offering different rationales for the action, says McGuire—such as not wanting to publish something that had already been on the Internet. Elsevier staff did not respond to phone calls from *Science*.



Hushed. John Hartung's (left) piece was kept out of this journal.

Hartung sees Elsevier's action as "a clear case of censorship." His critics, he says, "don't perceive their own in-group morality operating." Hartung, who has the support of a number of HBES members including Oxford zoologist William Hamilton, went to the annual meeting here 2 weeks ago prepared to pressure the HBES council to drop Elsevier and start a new journal if the publisher would not agree to a hands-off policy.

A showdown was avoided, however. While Randolph Nesse of the University of Michigan, chair of the HBES publications committee, says he won't comment on a "privately negotiated contract," others say a new 5-year deal with Elsevier stipulates that the editorial board will be "solely" responsible for the content of the journal. And the episode has had a ripple effect in the electronic realm: At its business meeting, the society voted to modify HBES-L rules to ban "insensitive" and "irrelevant" postings, such as those about Holocaust revisionism that entered the Hartung debate. But—no surprise—just who decides what's insensitive isn't clear.

—Constance Holden