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## **The fetus and fertility**

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INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION

Abortion, birth control, and the population explosion, continue to be among the divisive topics currently under popular discussion. These matters, formerly fairly peripheral to religious life, have become central. A combination of factors has led us in this direction. Medical treatments of the fetus and infants has advanced. New ways of treating infertility have been developed. Our understanding of conception has changed.

As technology enables ever younger infants to survive, our view of the early stages of life has changed. Modern medicine has decoupled sexual relations and child-bearing. Although efforts along these lines have long existed, they have not become reliable or widespread until recently. This has brought about a totally different view of children and a discussion of "wanted and unwanted babies." The process has gone much further with artificial fertilization and host mothers, and will take us in still different directions as we proceed with genetic-engineering.

These technological advances have been accompanied by legal and political changes. It has not only been government policy in most Western lands to further medical scientific studies, but also to couple them with legislation in an effort at social planning. Such legislation has sometimes been effective and on other occasions has had totally unexpected social results which have not been easy to correct.

The politics of population planning and the reaction of various religious and social groups in the Western World has led to widespread debate on each of these issues. They have, of course, existed, one might say, in

embryonic form for millennia. The early Jewish discussions were also limited and sometimes quasi *halakhic* or *aggadic*. The late nineteenth century changed all that and the twentieth century has brought more drastic changes.

This volume does not pretend to look at each of these questions in detail but we have viewed some of them thoroughly through essays or responsa. This volume should be seen as an effort to move the discussion along and to look seriously at a selected set of issues. Other problems connected with fertility, the fetus, demography, and related subjects, will be discussed in future volumes.