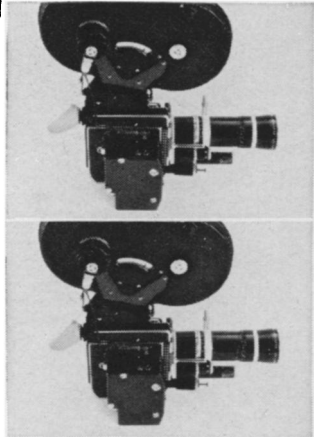


All you need to make movies is a 16mm Bolex, a lens, and talent.

All you need to make movies is a 16mm Bolex, a lens, and talent.



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Bolex H-16 Rex 5,  
The Professional.

## LETTERS

# to the editor

### Conception: a controversy

Sir:

Moral pronouncements made to tide us over a lack of fact and understanding may have some tentative social value, but need for improvement is signaled when faults in their derivation are recognized. That is the case with the distinction between contraception and abortion drawn by Dr. Paul Ramsey, professor of religion, as reported by Christopher Weathersbee (SN: 8/3, p. 119): Since the dividing cells of the conceptus "cannot be considered to be invested with individuality" while still capable of forming identical twins, arresting their development is considered contraception and acceptable, whereas later arrest is not.

That is a congenial way to dodge the old question whether each twin has half a soul or one twin has none—which is raised by the alternative hypothesis that the soul, or "individuality," begins sometime during the process of fertilization. But, if the Ramsey argument doesn't trip on the problem of individuality of Siamese twins, it certainly is carried into error by being tied to the mistaken assumption that the blastocyst is "much too far along to be capable of twinning." Twinning may occur in a number of ways, and the times vary. All Siamese twins and other twins with a common amnion result from a split or extra primitive streak. In man, primitive streak formation begins about 16 days after ovulation and blastocyst formation at about 3 or 4. Accordingly, if the distinction between contraception and abortion on the basis of twinning is correctly reasoned, due respect for the underlying facts would permit drawing the line almost 2 weeks later than it was drawn.

Arguments about when the term

"contraception" is proper tend to make a fundamental mistake of focusing attention on the offspring rather than the mother. Contraception means prevention of conception, and conception is a well-established, even ancient, term for a female mammal's becoming pregnant or gravid. Use of "conception" as a synonym for just "fertilization" is recent, the events and significance of fertilization having been seen and understood clearly in mammals only since the turn of the century. Still more recent discoveries point out the inappropriateness of that usage. If fertilized eggs are experimentally transferred from their mother to a foster mother or culture dish, the genetic mother is no more pregnant than the father. The foster mother becomes pregnant; the culture dish, hardly. The deciding factor is the female mammal's conception (*L. con capio*: capture, grasp, take in) of the developing conceptus through the process of implantation, which begins about a week after ovulation and fertilization in the case of the human. That, in turn, sets off hormonal changes that convert the menstrual cycle into a pregnancy cycle. Accordingly, if due respect is given to both the derivation of the term and the relevant physiology, "contraception" is a proper term for pregnancy-preventing measures applied any time before implantation.

Whether contraception is a proper procedure is another question. It is safer for the mother than becoming pregnant and safer for the family and for society than becoming overpopulated. It is, of course, not safer for the ova and spermatozoa that might have

(see *Letters p. 256*)

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# Tells How to Make Money Writing Short Paragraphs

## Chicago Man Reveals a Short Cut to Authorship

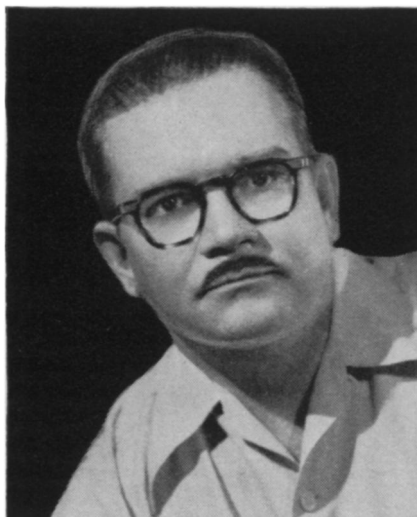
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Letters from p. 254

met or just did; instead it promotes their most probable natural fate, which is to perish. (Of 500,000 ova present in a pair of ovaries at birth, most degenerate, about 500 or 0.1 percent are ovulated, and perhaps 5 or 0.001 percent are fertilized, of which fewer than half survive until birth.) Where gametes, parents, siblings and society have conflicts of interest, fateful decisions are influenced by moral opinions of individuals, sects or authorities. But derivation of such opinions from inappropriate terminology and incorrect and perhaps irrelevant embryological fact seems less likely to lead to wise judgment than consideration of relevant facts and predictable consequences at the social, personal and physiological as well as microanatomical level.

Bent G. Böving, MD  
Carnegie Institution of Washington  
Department of Embryology  
Baltimore, Md.

### Dr. Ramsey replies:

I certainly do not want "moral pronouncements" to tide me over any mistakes of fact. Nor do I seek "a congenial way to dodge the old question whether each twin has half a soul," etc. I would neither put the question in any such fashion nor try to intervene upon the facts with a moral concept or proposal.

I suggested that, to rebut proof of the origin of the unique human individual from genotype, segmentation is as good a point as any and better than most in the continuum of life this side of resurrection. This was to say that we have a fellow human being, having claims like our own, *not earlier than* the time when it has been irreversibly settled whether there will be one, or two or more individuals launched into existence from cleavage of the genotype. Nothing in this moral judgment stands or falls by the facts, or seeks to discharge the facts. Indeed, correct information as to the facts are needed even to know how to use the proposed moral concept. I can only thank Dr. Böving for the additional information he has given me concerning twinning.

It is as if someone proposed that viability or quickening is the time after which we should count another congener to be present with us—before that pre-human fetal life—and mistook the time of viability or of quickening. This would be a significant mistake, but not one shattering to the moral concepts that were proposed.

For the rest, Dr. Böving combines

(see Letters p. 258)