

## **The origin of man**

### **Manuel Alfonseca**

We live in an era of contrasts. On the one hand, the twentieth century considered itself with pride *the century of the declaration of human rights*, of the assertion of the dignity of man. On the other hand, it is also the century when the most basic human right (the right of life) was denied to millions unborn human beings. Social situations like slavery, 150 years ago acceptable for many people, are now rightly considered barbarous. I don't think I'll be much mistaken if I predict that abortion will become one day the disgrace and the shame of our time.

Scientifically, the question poses no problems. For a biologist, there isn't any doubt that every individual generated by sexual reproduction, whichever its species, starts to exist at the fecundation of the ovum by the sperm cell. The arguments asserting that embryos are not human beings until some later time in the pregnancy have no biological basis. To which species, then, belongs the embryo, before that time?

The deadlines set in the legislation of some countries (12 or 24 weeks) are arbitrary. In the development of the embryo there is no critical moment associated to a significant change which can justify those limits. There isn't anymore a critical point at which the embryo can survive outside the mother. This limit moves, and depends, not on the embryo development, but on medical techniques, which improve with time. One day we'll be able to maintain the embryo alive and help it to develop from the moment of fecundation (a classical theme in science fiction).

Asserting that the embryo can be killed before it's able to live outside the mother is dangerous. Most of us can't survive out of human society, in the way of Robinson Crusoe. We are not viable without that society. The same argument can justify our elimination if we bother someone.