

Study: Babies Can See Faces Before They See the Light of Day

In opening *The Atlantic* this morning, an interesting article caught my eye. The title proclaimed: "[Fetuses Prefer Face-Like Images Even in the Womb.](#)"

I was intrigued. To be perfectly frank, I don't believe I had ever thought about the fact that a baby in the womb might be able to see, let alone recognize shapes resembling human faces *outside* the womb.

It appears that many others haven't given such a thought much consideration either, for the study, conducted by Vincent Reid, was a first of its kind.

As Reid explains in *The Atlantic*, the human womb is not as dark as we think it is, and thus babies are still able to see. Reid used various patterns of light to test what babies best respond to and found that light patterns most similar to human faces received the most reactions.

"'This is the first time that anyone's been able to deliver an image to a fetus,' Reid says. And it will finally allow scientists to study the mental abilities of humans at the earliest possible stage of our development—before we are even born.

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First, he and his colleagues created a mathematical model that would predict how light would pass through a mother's tissues, and what different images would look like to a fetus. Next, they used their model to calibrate two images—an upright triangle of red dots, and an inverted one. They shone

these patterns into the bellies of 39 pregnant women, and then slowly moved the lights to the side. And using ultrasound, they could see that the fetuses would turn their heads.

*They didn't always do so, though. They were more than twice as likely to track the movement of the upright face-like triangle than the inverted one—exactly the same pattern you find in newborn babies. **'This tells us that the fetus isn't a passive processor of environmental information,' says Reid. 'It's an active responder.'***

Such news should make us sit back and think. We live in an age where science is making huge strides in many areas. Such strides are fascinating and often beneficial – but they can also appear a bit gray at times, as in the case with [the human pig](#), the [three-parent baby](#), and other scenarios.

As C.S. Lewis noted in [The Abolition of Man](#), such tinkering can have severe consequences for mankind:

“We reduce things to mere Nature in order that we may ‘conquer’ them. ... The price of conquest is to treat a thing as mere nature. ... The wresting of powers from Nature is also the surrendering of things to Nature. As long as this process stops short of the final stage we may well hold that the gain outweighs the loss. But as soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same. ... [O]nce our souls, that is, ourselves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls.”

Hearing the latest research of how intelligent and how responsive humans are even before they see the light of day

should cause us to view Lewis' words with fresh eyes. In experiments, such as those mentioned above, we seem to treat young life as a thing of "mere nature."

Judging from Lewis' insights, that doesn't seem like a path that the prudent should wish to pursue.

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