

Hills like white
elephants by ernest
hemingway essay



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Published in 1927, Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants" is a pinnacle of conversation; that is, more under the surface of the interaction between a girl named Jig and an American man. At first glance, this seems like a simple, sometimes intense communication between two adults waiting for their train, which is going to Madrid. However, a closer reading reveals that they are discussing whether Jig should undergo a "procedure." At a time when abortion was illegal in most parts of Europe and America and where women might have been weaned from the Catholic Church if they had an abortion, suddenly the conversation between the American man and Jig becomes one of the most important, both for their beings and for their relationship. However, no one wants to communicate what choice they would like to make openly. This article discusses topics of choice, communication disruptions, and gender roles.

The plot of the story develops in such a way that the word "abortion" itself is never pronounced. In various situations, only the phrase "white elephants" appears, highlighting different facets of its meaning. The great writer's style, like the underwater part of an iceberg, hides not only the word "abortion" but also the fear of a young girl, unaware of pain for an unborn child, her flesh from her flesh, which is not destined to see God's light. The girl's dream of a child is inextricably linked with her vision of happiness and measured family life. These properties are genetically embedded in every woman, they are the essential purpose and obligation to be the parent, the one who gives life and the very name of the first woman "Eve" means "life." For the heroine, abortion is the collapse of last hope, leading only to the continuation of a meaningless life.

Let us recall how masterfully Hemingway draws hills whitening in the sun, scorched by the mercilessly blazing sun, the earth and green fields, the shady banks of a rivulet, and the moving shadows of clouds. These different frames are full of functional significance. These are the stages of the girl's state of mind, which is likened to scorched earth. At first, the comparison of the hills with white elephants evokes admiration for the girl. In the middle, this image reappears, but this time there are notes of heartbreaking doubt. In the final part, white elephants appear, but the girl's gaze only sees how they descend into the scorched valley. Together with the dream of a child, the colors of the world and hopes for happiness die for the heroine: they fade together. Making a decision, which is to kill her unborn child, turns into the most profound psychological stress, and the girl subconsciously knows that she says goodbye to the highest value.

There is a perception of meaninglessness, absurdity, an irreplaceable void of life, a sense of terrible spiritual poverty. In order to show her emotional conflict and struggle to explain it, Jig says: "Can't we stop talking?"¹ She feels that life will become unstable, lose stability, love will become soulless and will turn into bitter loneliness. In this life, fiction will take the place of genuine values. The gloom is already spreading not only around the person, and it is already powerfully penetrating the person himself. A man has nothing to rely on, and no one is waiting for him. He is powerless before the power of chaos, "No, we can't. It is not ours anymore," - this bitter remark of Jig describes the spiritual condition of a young woman in the best possible way².

It seems that the story is an excellent example of understanding the controversial bioethical problem: the problem of abortion, mother, and fetus, in which many aspects can be distinguished. This is a problem of the status of a human embryo, as well as the question of whether it is an individualized human life from the moment of fertilization. This question can be approached from different perspectives: biology and genetics, sociology, law (civil or criminal), psychological, historical, cultural, theological, and moral. From a bioethical perspective, all of the above positions should be combined to draw a solid conclusion.

Some readers, summing up the laws of genetics and embryology, might conclude that the fetus from the moment of conception has its determined biological reality. It is a fully distinguished human individual in development, which autonomously, step by step, continuously creates its form, carrying out, following the plans laid down in it, the project outlined in its genome. This fact is scientifically established and should be accepted as given, not like anyone else's opinion. Since the embryo is already a developing individual, which will become a specific person, we can freely talk about the ontological and ethical value of the newly conceived fetus. Starting from the first instant of the emergence of human life, the human individual is a human person. Any criticism of this position will be a denial of the ontological approach to personality.

From the very first days, the embryo enters into a special kind of dialogue with the mother's body, blocking the production of hormones through specific signals to the pituitary gland and other internal organs. Thus, the process causes a combination of changes in the mother's body, forcing it to “
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recognize" the presence of a new life, a unique personality³. Psychoanalysts prove that the fetus is in social relations with the mother, accumulating in-depth experiences, feelings, positive and negative impulses that, even in adulthood, will leave their imprint on it⁴. Sociologists say that it is not relationships that determine the reality of the subject, but the existence of the issue that makes interpersonal relationships possible⁵. However, a human fetus does possess a partial form of consciousness due to its responsiveness to outside signals.

It is critical to note that the given book gives a clear perspective on the issue of abortion. Under the current legislation, affirming the unrestricted right of every woman to have an abortion, is an example of a misunderstanding and use of freedom. The main character does not precisely show her stance on the issue, but either way, one's independence will be limited. In the framework of the strict logic of personalistic philosophy derived from the book, we can summarize that the embryo or the fetus, as a result of a continuous process of development programmed from the inside, is a unique human individual possessing actual social value. Besides, the embryo or the fetus has a genuine connection and a true destiny to become a person. Consequently, abortion is a crime against the life of a human person.

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