

in the ether dome at Boston, Massachusetts on 16 October 1846. Within four months Simpson employed ether in obstetric anaesthesia in a case that attracted widespread publicity. Although ether was widely employed it had many side effects and Simpson and his assistants popularised the use of chloroform in obstetric practice. Simpson made many other important contributions to obstetrics and also supported the concept of hand washing to prevent puerperal sepsis, as advocated by Semmelweis. Simpson also exemplified the idea of an all-rounder with broad interests in the arts, classics and archaeology. He was also well versed in theology.

Simpson's life and career are well known and have been the subject of several biographies, the first written by his friend and minister, Reverend John Duns, within three years of Simpson's death. This new book takes a different approach to biography in which the editors have assembled a range of specialist authors from different disciplines to build a picture of Simpson in the context of mid-nineteenth-century medicine and society. James Young Simpson was also the subject of a bicentenary symposium held at the University of Edinburgh in June this year, at which time this book was launched. The authors have succeeded admirably in their presentation of the multiple facets of Simpson's life in a way that gives due credit to his accomplishments, but without slipping into hagiography. The chapter on Simpson and the development of physical diagnosis paints him as an innovator in obstetrics and gynaecology who was grounded in the pathology of disease and in the scientific method of practice. His first academic appointment was as an assistant to a professor of pathology, and Simpson maintained a personal pathological museum. He promoted methods of physical examination of the pregnant woman and the use of uterine sounds, which he had earlier practised upon cadavers. The chapter on Simpson and Semmelweis is a valuable contribution analysing the correspondence between these two nineteenth-century figures and their understanding of the nature of puerperal sepsis. The author argues that Simpson was limited in his understanding of puerperal sepsis and considered it to be contagious, but failed to observe its crucial infectious quality.

Simpson's championing of the use of chloroform in childbirth met with religious as well as medical opposition. His biblical and theological training in the Free Church of Scotland and his religious views generally are canvassed in the chapter entitled, 'A Genuinely Religious Man? An Analysis of the Role of Religion in Simpson's Life'. It presents a picture of Simpson's religion as being somewhat complicated, but interconnected with all aspects of his life. It suggests that he was genuine in his faith rather than someone who had only an intellectual interest in religion. Other chapters touch on controversies over homeopathy in Edinburgh, the role of wet nurses and his expertise as an antiquary. The various chapters are well edited and despite multiple authorship the text maintains a consistent style throughout. This volume can be warmly recommended as a valuable addition to the biographical resources on James Young Simpson.

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Sara Dubow, *Ourselves Unborn: A History of the Fetus in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. viii + 308, £18.99/\$29.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-1953-2343-6.

Historian Sara Dubow may have borrowed the title of this book from a collection of lectures on embryology published in 1944 by the anatomist George Washington Corner

(1889–1981), but her focus is not on the fetus in science or medicine but in the American body politic.

The book opens with a snapshot of the different ways in which the American state currently protects and confers benefits on fetuses whilst withholding some of these privileges to many of the women on whose bodies fetuses depend. This paradox is supported by the so-called ‘pro-life’ constituency, and challenged by ‘pro-choice’ feminist scholars and activists in a variety of ways such as drawing attention to the historically and locally specific ways in which the fetus is understood, and by criticising images in anti-abortion propaganda which suggest the fetus is capable of existing independently of a woman’s body. Dubow acknowledges her debt to these critiques and contributes new insights by investigating how from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century the fetus and its relationships to women have been constructed in contexts other than and including struggles around abortion.

The ‘protean fetus’ is central to her analysis; it is capable of standing for different things to different people, and endorsing and commenting upon a wide range of ideas and politics. Dubow claims it emerged sometime between 1870 and 1920, a period during which reproductive biology achieved its modern formulation, and characterised by industrialisation, immigration and urbanisation. In debates about how to improve the quality of the population the fetus acquired the right to be born healthy, a demand that subsequently influenced ideas about maternal responsibilities. In the following chapters, Dubow introduces other fetal identities arranged in a loose chronology and analysed in the context of specific and acrimonious controversies. The public fetus fashioned by embryology is scrutinised in how the public responded to its display in fairs and museums between the 1930s and 1970s, a period covering the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War. The fetus as a quasi-legal person is interrogated in the context of the backlash to the landmark decision of *Roe vs Wade* (1973) which liberalised access to abortion throughout the USA, and which amongst other things led to heated debates about the ethics of research using fetuses *ex utero*. It was no accident that these took place in Boston, where the Irish Catholic community was enraged by policies around integration of schools. The fetus as citizen is shown exploiting the currency of the social movements of the 1960s that fought for racial, gender and sexual equality. By the 1970s fetal rights threatened the constitutional and legal rights of women. One of Dubow’s examples here is employers’ attempts to defeat blue-collar women workers’ campaigns for equality by claiming that the presence of the fetus on the shop floor was detrimental to its welfare. In effect, corporations were treating fetuses as privileged members of the workforce. In the 1980s the fetus as victim witnessed successful prosecutions of women who committed fetal abuse. Despite copious scientific evidence to the contrary, fetuses supposedly capable of suffering pain began to be championed by the Christian right during the Reagan era.

Although each fetal identity was dominant during a specific period, none was abandoned. This device allows Dubow to account for the perplexing personality of the contemporary American fetus: it is suffering from a multiple personality disorder.

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