

Mary Warnock moves this theme forward with her analysis of the trend away from the idea of welfare as the basic principle of education and the embracing of the market ideas of choice and competition instead. She proposes a return to a paternalistic education, trusting local authorities to know how to distribute resources for local needs. Ironically, her concerns about school-based initial teacher education are more timely and pertinent than when she made the lecture, with the considerable extension of such programmes nationally.

The two religious, or spiritual, offerings are again quite different. Jonathan Sacks takes the discussion in a different direction again exploring the difference between societies based on contracts which get broken in times of hardship and those based on a Jewish concept of covenants which provide a binding force of community. He is concerned that the language of morality has become detached from family and tradition. On the other hand Stewart Sutherland argues for a humanistic spirituality based on the development of the soul, which he maintains is what education is fundamentally about.

The final chapters by Mary Midgley and Brian Appleyard take the discussion looking at the divide between science and the arts and the implications this has for our understanding of knowledge. To an extent they both argue that science and the arts complement one another in the search for knowledge. Brian Appleyard in particular warns that science or scientism disconnected from ideas of intrinsic value is dangerous.

The book identifies threats to education and educational values and the essays propose two possible ways forward. On the one hand are those who argue essentially for reverting to the previous state affairs and denounce the “new education” (Quinton, O’Hear and Warnock, for example) while on the other are those who propose some middle way forward (Pring, Midgley and Appleyard). The breadth of approaches and diversity of contributors is a strength of the book which means many readers will find angles which are new to them. Clearly, a book presented to a general audience will never be able to provide the depth that specialists will want, but this book does succeed in weaving together several disciplinary approaches critical of the empiricist orthodoxy and sympathetic to a view the moral basis of education. Those who argue for education to be progressive, post-modern, market-friendly or empiricist in orientation are not represented in the book, excepting Richard Pring’s essay. It would have been interesting and complementary to have reflections from the business world or politics. Nevertheless, *Values, Education and the Human World* provides a multidisciplinary offering of a particular camp with passionately argued cases and should appeal to many with general interests in education, values and moral philosophy.

ROBERT A BOWIE

**THE SOUL OF THE EMBRYO: AN ENQUIRY INTO THE STATUS OF THE HUMAN EMBRYO IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION** by David Albert Jones, *Continuum*, London, 2004, Pp. 266, £16.99 hbk.

This is a useful and impressive book – a clear, careful, scholarly analysis of the various views that authoritative Christians, and the traditions that influenced them, have taken on this topic. The author cites opinions of all kinds. His central aim, however, is to counter recent suggestions that Christian thinkers have not always treated embryos as sacrosanct – in fact, that the churches have sometimes licensed abortion.

The history here is complex and interesting. Greek and Jewish traditions conflicted sharply on the topic – as, of course, they also did over homosexuality. The Greeks and Romans mostly allowed both abortion and infanticide, partly from a fear of

over-population in their small city-states. Thus, Aristotle in the *Politics* directs that any excess pregnancies should be aborted, though this should be done 'before life and sense have begun'. The Jews, by contrast, saw population expansion as a blessing and as a fulfilment of the divine command, 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'. Accordingly they saw the whole development of the embryo as an inviolable divinely-ordered process which must not be interrupted. Christian thought followed them here, firmly forbidding infanticide – which was one of its most striking innovations – and in general forbidding abortion as well.

Some Christian theorists, however, followed Aristotle in making a distinction between early and late abortion. Notably, for instance, St Thomas held that the matter composing the early embryo did not receive the intellectual soul that made it fully human until the 40<sup>th</sup> day from conception if it was male and not till the 90<sup>th</sup> if it was female. Not surprisingly, recent theorists have seen these ideas as providing a rationale for early abortion. Dr Jones, however, cites many texts to show that this was intended as scarcely more than a legal distinction marking the borders of what counted strictly as homicide. Abortion and contraception were still viewed as mortal sins, even though slightly less grave ones than murder. Preventing a human life was considered almost, and sometimes quite, as bad as destroying one. The only conceivable exception was where a continued pregnancy presented an immediate threat of death to the mother, and even that was hedged about with restrictions.

Dr Jones himself accepts this position and ends his book with a heartfelt plea on behalf of the compassion which, as he says, the doctrine embodies on behalf of 'the least of these little ones'. It is not enough (he says) to protect embryos only after the moment of implantation. They exist as individuals from the moment of fertilization. So the morning-after pill too is excluded. It too is murder.

For him and his authorities, then, no questions arise. Abortion is not a problem. Can those of us who, by contrast, find it a complex and painful problem fully understand this position? It seems to me that we might have more chance of doing so if contraception – which is the most obvious means of avoiding abortion – were not forbidden as well. On this topic, some of the reasoning cited is extraordinary. St Jerome, for instance, writes, of a woman preventing pregnancy, 'As often as she could have conceived or given birth, of that many homicides she will have been guilty'. Here the rationale cannot really be the compassion that Dr Jones appeals to, since these new humans do not exist at all. It must presumably be the sheer need to increase the number of human souls available for salvation.

Why was this consideration considered so overwhelming? One reason, which emerges in many of the texts, was clearly the suspicion that births were being prevented in order to conceal adultery. But these texts also show a quite startling lack of interest in other possible pressures that might lead to abortion – in the various calamities, ranging from rape, incest and insanity through all kinds of ill-health and social hardship, that can strike pregnant women and make a further birth disastrous, both to themselves and to their families.

Compassion is indeed involved here, but something has surely been working to make that compassion strangely one-sided and also to extend it back by *fiat* from the later embryo to the very early one. Where there is no nervous system there is surely no feeling and – whatever other reasons may come in here – the point cannot actually be compassion. The trouble is that, during that time, we are dealing with an entity that really does change its nature, but the theorists insist on maintaining a single fixed response to this changing entity throughout the change – on always treating an acorn as an oak, an apple-pip as an apple-tree. Definitions of words like 'person' are often manipulated in the hope of making this attitude plausible. Thus Dr Jones cites Boethius as supporting the view that the human embryo – any embryo apparently – 'like the new-born baby, is not a "potential person" but a person with potential'.

However, altering language in this way cannot simplify the facts. The vast developmental process which, in less than a year, turns a couple of cells into a

fully-formed human is so mysterious to us that we naturally stumble and are often uncertain how to react to it. Much of the time we rightly treat it with a strong, general, undifferentiated respect. But sometimes there are emergencies – genuine clashes of interest where its claims do really have to be weighed against those of the people surrounding it. This is a real choice of evils, requiring decisions that must try to do justice to all parties. I have seen no arguments in this book to persuade me that such questions can always be given the same simple answer. But I do have a clearer idea of the background that has led people to want one.

MARY MIDGLEY

**PHILOSOPHY AND ITS PUBLIC ROLE** edited by William Aiken and John Haldane, *St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2004, Pp.viii+272, £14.95, pbk.{PRIVATE}

This is a collection of papers by former Fellows of the St. Andrews Centre for Ethics, Philosophy and Public Affairs. Several of the authors are American and it is therefore appropriate that the opening piece, by Haldane, considers the transference of philosophical leadership in the English-speaking world from Britain to the United States. While in many areas of philosophy that has brought huge rewards, it may explain some of the unease I feel with the essays in the present volume. Many seem to work within the parameters of the discourse of “public reason” in the American “constitutional” context: at its lowest the “democratic” process of sitting down and working out socially convenient arrangements to solve immediate problems with agreed disagreement on fundamentals – if not in many quarters an assumption that moral foundationalism is impossible or unnecessary.

The tone of much of the discussion is summed up by John Arthur as follows (p. 44): “Public reason’s most fundamental commitment – at least Rawls’s social contract variant – is to identify institutions and laws that can win the approval of all citizens, viewed as free and independent equals.” In this and similar formulations of contemporary needs, we find that the active role of the state (or of the government or the *polis* more widely understood) has more or less disappeared; it has been replaced (at least in social policy) by the notion of the provision of a “level playing-field” for warring, and often well – if covertly – financed interest-groups. Which in some cases, as in that of abortion, amounts to promoting a compromise between good and evil policies – though happily Rawls’s goal of the approval of all the citizens can never be reached.

This book admittedly is about applied philosophy, and it is revealing that its general spirit is post-Kantian, the debate being determined by the deliverances of practical reasoning, without metaphysics. That means that from the Catholic point of view the results can only be provisional, even though some of the detailed analysis is useful and sophisticated. Thus one of the essays concerns the possible special responsibility of intellectuals to contribute to public debate. Intellectuals can be sophists and publicists as well as philosophers; indeed if reasoning is solely instrumental, as many hold, they cannot be anything else.

As is appropriate, the remaining topics in the present volume are wide-ranging: they include the individual and society, post-mortem reproduction, the nature and desirability of equality, human rights (the revealing current phrase for natural rights), punishment (capital and other), globalization and the perils of the internet, faith schools and military tribunals. Underlying and unresolved questions include: the benefits and limits of tolerance; the nature and limits of human rationality, a topic on which an untoward degree of optimism is generally shown; a possible non-conventional basis for rights claims.

The attentive reader of the present volume can learn how to sharpen his arguments about the contemporary problems debated – especially where the wisdom of