The Worth of a Child

Thomas H Murray, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1996, 221 pages \$29.95, cloth.

Thomas Murray, the director of the Center for Biomedical Ethics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, has written a thoughtful, readable, informative, and challenging book. He is plainly an experienced exponent of biomedical ethics as practised in the United States and he is an accomplished author who writes in a relaxed and engaging style.

I was not impressed by the cover too much like the loveable babes pictured on infant formula packets, nor by the title (perhaps I am unduly influenced by Winnicott's equally enigmatic phrase "there is no such thing as a baby"). But my fears of forthcoming romanticisation and sentimentalism were quelled by reading the text and appreciating the skill with which Murray has set about his apparently self-imposed dual task of "exploring the ethics of adult-child relationships, and examining what contributes to sound thinking in ethics".

For this he has chosen some of the currently celebrated ethical issues engendered by modern reproductive medicine, paediatric care, and advances in genetics. The topics to which he gives extensive coverage include: abortion; adoption; infertility and alternative ways of making babies; prenatal testing, and research with children. These are appropriately linked with important moral issues such as the quest for the perfect child; moral obligations to the not-yet born child; the place of motherhood, and Scope of responsible parenthood. His source material and the majority of the references are of United States origin.

The field is fully explored from, as he puts it, "the dramatic to the mundane". I particularly valued his discussion of everyday events which involve moral issues among adults, especially parents, and children because this leads to a baser understanding of the central role of adult-child relations in the bioethics of reproduction and child-rearing. Murray gives more than competent descriptions and analysis of high-profile and headline-hitting cases, which are not always a sound basis for considered moral judgments.

He disclaims any attempt to come up with "a comprehensive moral theory about adult-child relations" but he has elevated the area of discourse to a level that takes serious account of the biology of human reproduction and views the child as an inter-dependent partner rather than just another incompetent human being along with the senile and the insane, or as a piece of parental property.

Emphasis on "mutualism" leads him to deny that consent is the key issue in research on children, and that personhood is the main factor in the abortion debate. Perhaps surprisingly he argues strongly against non-directive, non-judgmental genetic counselling. His disenchantment with these and some other ideological stances of contemporary bioethics has prompted his alternative approach.

The third section of the book is devoted to further discussion about the process of practical moral reasoning. Murray marshalls well argued reasons for rejecting what he calls "top-down" ethics as imposed by abstract moral theories or by the shortlist of principles as codified by Beauchamp and Childress and now put into reflective equilibrium mode. He claims that both provide neither a satisfactory approach to present-day problems nor a practical frame for issues involving adult-child relations. Furthermore they will be inadequate as guides for the future.

So what is the proposed alternative advanced by Murray? Instead of setting out a formal system of reasoning he offers a metaphor - tapestry and web. As I understand it the underlying philosophy is broadly utilitarian. The process is a kind of "felicitic calculus" by which duly weighted relevant information (the threads) derived from a pictorial representation (the tapestry) of the place of children in the lives of adults is used to formulate an outcome (the web) which best fits the goal of human flourishing.

How this might work in practice eludes me and I look forward to confirmation of Murray's approach. Meanwhile I commend this book, which makes an important contribution to the medical ethics of childhood.

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Divided Minds, Successive Selves: Ethical Issues in Disorders of Identity and Personality

Jennifer Radden, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1996, 311 pages, £33.95

This is a truly cross-disciplinary text from an author trained in both abnormal psychology and analytical philosophy. The book achieves a worthwhile aim in being accessible at an introductory level whilst containing a wealth of useful discussion for the expert. It is also up-to-date with respect to relevant developments in ethics, the philosophy of personal identity, and the philosophy of psychopathology, and is thus an extremely useful sourcebook and guide to this complex and difficult area.

Discursive rather than descriptive in approach, the book begins with a concern about what attitude should be adopted towards individuals who exhibit radical changes in their personality and self-conception. Radden poses two specific questions: first, on what basis do an individual's experiences actually belong solely to him/her? (the unity/disunity issue); second, is an individual the same person now as at some earlier time? (the continuity/discontinuity issue). The book explores possible responses to these questions in four ways.

The first section, *Divided minds and successive selves*, focuses on divisions and heterogeneities associated with, on the one hand, the normal self and on the other hand, the pathological self: topics include self-deception, akrasia, dissociative states, and organic disorders of the self. A "language of successive selves" is offered, drawing on John Locke's ideas about the same individual making, at different times, different persons; connections are made with recent work by Derek Parfit.

The second section, *Successive selves and personal responsibility*, explores problems of moral and legal responsibility arising from the notion of successive selves, and deals with forensic, legal and ethical issues, as well as issues attaching to therapeutic responsibility and contrition; the purposes and discourses of responsibility; multiplicity and legal culpability; paternalistic intervention, and

responsibility over oneself in the future, or over one's future selves.

The third section, *Successive selves and individualism*, deals with philosophical, clinical and cultural issues arising from the notion of successive selves. Topics include: the metaphysics of successive selves; the normativity of individualism; therapeutic goals for a liberal culture, and the continuity of self-sufficiency for individualism.

The fourth section, *Divided minds*, addresses the issue of whether the clinical and scientific evidence supports the notion of divided minds and multiple selves, and ends by exploring philosophical ideas on self-ownership.

Two rather more general issues emerge early on and re-appear throughout the text. The first concerns the problem of how we should act towards persons/patients/clients whose behaviour challenges the traditional concept of a person (as being a unified, motivationally transparent organism subject to a single will and capable of introspective deliberation). The second concerns the more general problem of the ethics of the relationship between practitioner and client, or simply between one person and another, in an age when the political, legal and moral views of the individual (grounded on the traditional concept of a person) stand in stark contrast to a cultural outlook (styled "modernism" by Radden but more typically termed "post-modernism" in philosophy, literature, and the arts) which poses radical challenges to precisely this view of the individual.

Modernism/post-modernism has created a climate of acceptance for radical ideas about the self, ideas which, only a century ago, were viewed as eccentric and bizarre. What is highly encouraging is that concerns in the clinical and research literature in modern psychiatry, abnormal psychology, and neuroscience are increasingly engaging with the relevant concerns in contemporary philosophy of mind, and vice-versa, to produce a growing area of inter-disciplinary discussion and debate which can only benefit all involved. Radden's book is very much in the spirit of this new climate of cooperative inquiry, whilst maintaining an admirably sharp focus on her subject matter. More than this, though, the text will be of interest to those engaged not only in the areas mentioned above, but also to those working in the relevant areas of law and social policy.

Radden sustains an approach which is accessible but does not duck the important issues. She fully acknowledges the highly problematic ethical issues raised for practitioners, whilst addressing possible responses with great clarity. Similarly, the philosophical problems of personal identity and the unity of the self are carefully set out, and the philosophical resources on hand are subject to critical scrutiny. As Radden herself acknowledges, she has achieved more by way of analysis than in terms of synthesis or resolution. But this is, none the less, a *tour de force* of intellectual inquiry.

Only one reservation comes to mind when reflecting upon the book as a whole. Radden adopts a moderately Lockean view of the person, and gives the impression that "person" and "self" can be viewed as being synonymous. This is to ignore recent (post-modernist) cultural developments which have found expression in Continental and, increasingly, in analytical, philosophy. The philosophical expression of these developments i) acknowledges fundamental conceptual and methodological problems with views such as Radden's; whilst, ii) situating the traditional concept of a person in the context of the ethical, legal, and political concerns which originally motivated it; and, iii) subjecting the concept of reflexivity to critical scrutiny as a philosophical problem in its own right. These recent developments reflect what is essentially a cultural change in the way individuals conceive of themselves, which cuts across all the conventional disciplinary boundaries of academia (for a useful introduction, and response, to some of the philosophical issues, see Luntley).¹

It would have been helpful to both philosophers and practitioners if Radden had acknowledged these matters and their relevance to the clinical and philosophical issues she deals with, if only for the sake of completeness. However, this is but a small gripe - overall Radden has succeeded in producing a text that will interest both practitioners and philosophers at all levels of expertise, and which will, without doubt, inform debate on these issues for a considerable time.

References

- 1 Luntley M. *Reason, truth, and self: the postmodern reconditioned*. London: Routledge, 1995.

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World in Crisis. The Politics of Survival at the End of the Twentieth Century

Médecins sans Frontières, Doctors Without Borders, London, Routledge, 1997, xvii + 213 pages, £10.99

The very name, *Doctors without Borders/Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF), implies a critique of national and international organisations. The concept of genocide was formulated in 1944 as a response to the persecution of ethnic, religious and political minorities by autocratic states. The Holocaust exposed the failure of the international community to act collectively to save the lives of the deprived and persecuted, and the lack of independence of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Although the United Nations and its technical agencies, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), were established to remedy this situation, there remained a horrific potential for vulnerability to genocidal persecution as well as to natural disasters. Given that intergovernmental organisations are prone to bouts of bureaucratic paralysis, non-governmental organisations have advantages of flexibility and an ability to deliver effective assistance. States and international organisations have often failed to act in the interests of humanity, arguably revoking the right to intervene which they practised during the nineteenth century. Although the record of intergovernmental organisations such as UNICEF is highly creditable, these bodies still face structural limitations.

World in Crisis is the fourth in a series of volumes reporting on this charity's activities. Although MSF was founded in 1971, thereby giving the book something of the air of a 25-year celebration, only the foreword is at all (albeit sketchily) historical. At the same time the tone is by no means celebratory, merely totting up the amounts of aid dispensed, but there is a call for self-reflection in the face of often ghastly situations. The authors call for reflection on past experiences, so that highly principled policies can be invoked whenever genocide and other disasters arise.

The book opens by raising the issue of genocide, which has plagued the twentieth century. The foreword by Rony Brauman speaks despairingly of