

parents, the essential aim of surrogacy is to bring children into existence for parents who want them. In this way parenthood by surrogacy would be closer to normal parenthood than adoption can be, retaining to some degree the element of creative responsibility for the child coming into existence and the possibility of a genetic link, depending on the form of surrogacy, between the commissioning parents and the child. This would suggest that institutional support for a practice of surrogacy should be kept apart from arrangements for adoption and fostering.

This analysis is not complete, but it is perhaps sufficient to show that surrogacy deserves closer attention than the Warnock Committee has given it before measures are taken to suppress all forms of it, particularly non-profit surrogacy. (A fuller discussion appears in my *Donation, surrogacy and adoption. Journal of applied philosophy* 1985; 2/2.)

The two new chapters in *A Question of Life* are concerned with philosophers' questions – the introduction with questions about the nature of morality, the conclusion with questions about the standing of committees of inquiry such as the Warnock Committee. All philosophers acknowledge that moral disagreements can seem irreconcilable in the sense that no solution that will satisfy everyone can be found and that people are sometimes inclined to say 'I simply feel that it is wrong'. Mary Warnock dignifies such disagreements by calling them conflicts of 'fundamental values', thus stopping the demand for rational justification.

Whatever the philosophical merits of this theory – and it cannot claim general agreement among philosophers – it is dangerous, particularly when imposed on a committee of inquiry. There is no clear test to tell us when fundamental values have been reached, and people with strong convictions or entrenched positions may be encouraged by the theory to abandon the rational process too soon. That might have happened in the Warnock Committee.

Warnock makes much of the fact that in morality there are no finally 'correct' judgements. This fits with, and she might even think it implies, her particular theory of 'fundamental values'. She certainly seems to think it means that committees of inquiry may sometimes have to leave it to Parliament to decide between conflicting values. And, of course, they may. But how on her theory is Parliament to decide? Do we have any protection there against the 'fundamental values' of dogmatists and

absolutists?

Such a theory can seem all right at the level of individuals. We can agree to differ so long as other people's values do not impinge on us. But in matters of government and legislation there must be a clear commitment to rationality, that is, a commitment to the idea of rational justification of policy and legislation. This Mary Warnock herself appeared to recognise when she inveighed against the moral absolutism of Enoch Powell in an article in *The Times*.

#### References

- (i) Warnock M. Absolutely wrong. *The Times* 1985 May 30: 12.

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## Child Sexual Abuse Within the Family

Editor, Ruth Porter, 156 pages, London, £6.35, Tavistock Publications, 1984

This book was written by a multidisciplinary study group including a policeman and a barrister who met on 17 occasions between September 1981 and March 1984 at the Ciba Foundation. The aim was to provide guidance for different professional groups when confronted with cases of child abuse in the family. It is only in the last few years that the extent of this problem has begun to be recognised and in this country help for victims, assailants and their families is still patchy and ill-coordinated.

The group looked at the way these cases were presented to the different professionals and guidelines are suggested for dealing with them, emphasising the need for careful planning and co-ordination of efforts. They consider a multidisciplinary approach vital. The book ends with some illustrative case reports.

The group stress that the first need is for education of all the professions involved into the extent of child sexual abuse and the need to be alert to its possibility. When cases are recognised workers should have access to therapy teams who can cope with the children, the assailant and all members of the family and they emphasise the need for better liaison between workers so that no one person is coping with one bit of the problem in ignorance of the whole situation.

The idea of joint responsibility can cause problems to many professionals – most of us become over-possessive of our patients, particularly perhaps the medical profession, and most controversial of all is involvement of the law. We are trained to put the needs of the patient before all else, but unfortunately the best interests of the child may not always be served by involving the law, since questioning and examination in a police station and appearance in court can be more harmful than the offences themselves. This often drives general practitioners, for example, to keep quiet about their suspicions, but unfortunately if the father is the assailant and the mother refuses to accept the child's story, as often happens, the only way to get a child to a place of safety may be to involve the law. The police, on their part, are trained to concentrate on convicting offenders and have in the past ignored the plight of victims, but ways must be found to make court appearances less traumatic for the latter.

To aid co-ordination the suggestion is made that child sexual abuse liaison officers should be appointed by the police in all areas to liaise with the child abuse co-ordinators already appointed by social services departments and in some areas this has already been done. They suggest more use be made of probation to prevent the disruptive effect of a prison sentence on the family, but they also emphasise that the first priority must be to get the child to a place of safety.

Finally, the suggestion is made that all children should be alerted to the dangers and told how to avoid allowing anyone, even members of the family, abusing them. They point out also that there are few crisis telephone lines or self-help groups where the children themselves can independently seek help.

The message from this study group is loud and clear. These are very serious problems and need the co-operation of us all; we must try to come to terms with the difficult ethical problems they pose so that the best possible help can be given to all members of the families involved.

This is a book to be read and discussed by all those working in this difficult field.

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