

Short literature notices

R. Andorno

© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010

Marcum, J.A.: *An Introductory Philosophy of Medicine*. Milton Keynes, U.K.: Springer, 2008. 369 pages. ISBN 978-1402067969. Price: £ 94.50.

There are actually not too many introductory books in the field of philosophy of medicine. To meet this need, James Marcum, a philosopher of science with a background in physiology, has written *An Introductory Philosophy of Medicine*, with the subtitle *Humanizing Modern Medicine*. The main title is promising and clear but the subtitle is obscure, at least until the author's agenda is clarified in the first few pages.

Marcum opens with a general discussion about the nature of philosophy of medicine. The very clear introduction builds, for example, upon Edmund Pellegrino's distinction between a philosophy *in* medicine, a philosophy *of* medicine, and a third relationship, philosophy *and* medicine. Marcum seems to agree with William Stempsey who has noted that there has "always been a philosophy lurking behind medical thought and practice". The rest of the book is divided into three parts, which examine the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical foundations of medicine. Practically everything in this vast area is covered at least briefly. The approach is *top-down*, that is, philosophical theory is introduced first and its implications to medical practice are shortly discussed later.

There are two major problems that interfere with the joy of reading this book. Firstly, a crisis in the quality of care is presented as a starting point. Such a crisis is, however, far

too easily taken for granted and neither defined nor described. Whether such a crisis exists or not is an *empirical* question and should be treated as such. Where is the evidence, for example, that the quality of care at some previous point in time has been higher than it is today?

Secondly, a dichotomy between *biomedicine* and *humane medicine* is presented as another starting point. The source of (almost) all problems is the biomedical model, according to which "the patient is a machine composed of individual body parts that, when broken or lost, can be fixed or replaced by new parts". A physician working in the context of this model chooses the therapeutic modality, "often with little patient consultation", and sees death as a defeat that should be avoided at all costs. The medical profession "values emotionally detached concern or a chastened or masculinized form of empathy over genuine or authentic empathic care". Luckily, the world can be saved by the recently emerged humanistic or humane models of medicine. Here the author has built a straw man—"biomedical practitioner"—and gives his sympathies to the brave "humanistic practitioner" in the fight over the future of medicine. But the medical world is not that simple and the dichotomy is, instead, more annoying than helpful.

These two problems are not minor in a book written by a philosopher of science who specialises in philosophy of medicine. It is, however, possible to read the book and simply leave these issues aside. Essentially, it is a rich source book, as the back cover proclaims: "the book's unique features include a comprehensive coverage of the various topics in the philosophy of medicine that have emerged over the past several decades and a philosophical context for embedding bioethical discussions". This is certainly true, and the author is to be congratulated. Contrary to another claim on the back cover, however, I am sceptical about the book's suitability for textbook purposes,

R. Andorno (✉)
Institute of Biomedical Ethics, University of Zurich,
Zollikerstrasse 115, 8008 Zurich, Switzerland
e-mail: andorno@ethik.uzh.ch

Hardegger, J.: *Willenssache. Die Infragestellung der Willensfreiheit durch moderne Hirnforschung als Herausforderung für Theologie und Ethik*. Münster: LIT, 2009. 199 pages. ISBN 978-3643800145. Price: € 18.90.

The debate on free will is probably the most widely known and most publicly discussed aspect of neurobiological research. With her dissertation, Judith Hardegger has written a short, but comprehensive and very readable introduction.

She first discusses the provocation of neurobiology, based on the experiments of Benjamin Libet, their critique and extension by Haggard/Eimer and the consequences made popular by the publications of Roth and Singer: there is no free will; everything is determined by neural activities. The second part describes the critical reaction, not only philosophical and theological, but also by representatives in criminal law and neurobiologists themselves. The third part finally presents the author's own arguments against the deterministic challenge to free will: that human freedom is far from being unconditioned, but makes allowances for physical and above all neuronal constraints. In the very last ten pages she formulates an outlook of not to "throw out the baby with the bath water", but rather learn from neurobiological findings.

The strength of this book undeniably lies in its comprehensiveness. It comprises not only recent and more familiar philosophical responses such as by Peter Bieri and Michael Pauen, but also old arguments still worthy of consideration such as those by Max Planck in 1923. An informative chapter is the one on criminal law. It shows the familiarity of the author with the forensic aspect, as she has already co-authored a paper with Frank Urbaniok, psychiatrist and forensic expert witness. The reader might also find helpful the information on methodological and conceptual critique, coming from neuroscientists themselves. Often the debate is presented as "neurobiology against the humanities". But it is not just ethical or philosophical concerns that can be raised against neural determinism, there are also grave scientific objections, and it is the merit of this book to have pointed out some of them.

But this shows that the shortness of the book is its strength as well as its weakness. Arguments are often presented rather than discussed. The reader is left with different positions and has to make up his/her own mind. Sometimes one would wish for a more detailed treatment, rather than just juxtaposing arguments.

The author's own summary at the end explicitly proposes to refute neurobiological determinism on the grounds of inner inconsistency. It is not empirically falsifiable and therefore not scientific, but a question of belief ("Glaubenssatz"). Roth and Singer, however, would rightly object, that many scientific theories (among others evolutionary theory) are not empirically falsifiable. And likewise

theologians would object, 'belief' is not primarily characterized by its failure to be falsified. Her further arguments are—against her own intent—consequentialistic: Without free will, personhood and dignity are lost, and moral relativism or materialism will spread.

The author's outlook is worth thinking about. We might have to generate new concepts bridging the gap between matter and mind. I have only my doubts about quantum theory being (once again) the silver bullet.

Christina Aus der Au
Basel, Switzerland

Bayle, B.: *À la poursuite de l'enfant parfait. L'avenir de la procréation humaine* Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009. 321 pages. ISBN: 9782221108192. Price: € 20.

This is the sixth book of Benoît Bayle, a clinical psychiatrist at a hospital in Chartres, France, and a Doctor of philosophy. The volume is devoted to a critical discussion of reproductive technologies in contemporary liberal societies, of its ideology, and its practice. The incentives as well as the justification of such technologies are often grounded in the "right" to have a child if and when it is desired; they follow the logics of embryo overproduction, embryo selection and embryo destruction. The principles and possible misuses of these procedures have been so far criticized mainly from the philosophical, theological and biological perspectives. The work of Bayle intends to explore the issue, and in particular, the humanity of the unborn child, from the viewpoint of psychology.

As a clinical psychiatrist, Bayle studies the prenatal period of the infant. His analysis demonstrates and displays the emergence of a psychopathological problematic from the very moment of conception. Thus he is being led to working out the notion of "conceptional identity." Nobody questions the child's genetic identity, determined by the fertilization of the maternal egg, thus being situated on a biological level. It does exist however also a "conceptional identity", thanks to which the human embryo enters at its very conception into the psychosocial domain. An embryo is "a being conceived by a man and a woman, at a certain moment of the history of humankind and at a certain place of the world" (p. 186). As soon as it is conceived, the embryo is not only a biological being: it is also, from the beginning, a psychological reality. His conceptional identity is determined by the conditions of his generation, his history and the identity of those who called him to life. A child conceived by a rape is suffering from an aggression against its dignity, an aggression which has a bearing on the very foundations of his identity. The being thus

conceived embodies during his whole life the trauma of his conception for those who are aware of it, as well as for himself, in case he learns about it. The mother not only continues to face the memory of the aggression, she also bears the child who so to say embodies this aggression and she relates to it according to this condition, i.e. as to a subjectivity which makes the aggressor present. However this does not yet mean to assert that the embryo would bear the material marks of the traumatism which gave to it its existence neither to assign to him self-consciousness. According to Bayle, the being in gestation embodies a history, it does possess an origin and a conceptional identity which confer to its biological body a specific subjectivity, and all these elements constitute a decisive element in the genesis of the prenatal relation between the mother and the child. In this sense, the prenatal period represents “a regular stage” of the psychological history of a human being (p. 225). This continuity is being illustrated in a spectacular way through the analogy between the disturbances observed in children born by *in vitro* fertilization and embryo selection, and those affecting the survivors of natural and technical catastrophes. The prenatal period is not only an authentic moment of the psychological genesis of an individual, it is also a sphere of the interaction with the mother. The baby the woman carries in her womb is like a graft to assimilate, to integrate into herself, and “the human being which is conceived does not simply take root in the maternal body, it also implants in the mother’s psychism” (p. 227).

Bayle’s studies contribute to a better understanding of the “psychological gestation”, this early construction of the mother–child relationship of which they describe some misadventures, like the often-talked about “denial of pregnancy”. The author’s insistence on the integration of the prenatal period into the psychological gestation of a human being sheds light upon reproductive technologies’

hidden premises. The self-justification of these procedures is finally grounded on the acceptance of a radical difference between those who are born and those who are not yet born. But the psychoanalysis of the prenatal period refutes this assumption. If however the embryo is not essentially different from the child who is born, why should not he or she possess the same human dignity which prescribes never to treat somebody as a means but always as an end of our action? This raises the question of the compatibility of the unborn child’s dignity with the diverse reproductive technologies. In the same way as the design-baby “produced” to heal a sibling is an instrument because he is the object of an intervention carried out for the sake of someone else, the individuals called into existence to quench the desire for a child are not appreciated by themselves but as regarded as mere means. The autonomy of every human being combined with their participation into intersubjective exchanges reveals the truth of the human condition. At the same time, the will to call into existence another individual is mixed with the advent of him or her thanks to a natural process. With his theory of “conceptional identity” B. Bayle unveils the squalid message of reproductive technologies. To produce a desired child, one assumes the legitimacy of manipulations leading to the destruction of a multiplicity of human embryos. In this way, the child effectively called into existence is a being entirely dependent on the will of its authors. How could he thereafter strive for an autonomous existence, how could then he become himself? Reproductive technologies claim to provide us with a complete control of human fertility. They however omit to mention that this power risks leading to a degradation of the Other who is the child, by treating him as a mere instrument.

Miklos Vetö
Paris, France