

pleasure, as if it is the pleasure that is morally important, while the human being is not."

This is a text well worth offering to busy students, healthcare professionals or interested readers who would like a clear concise introduction to the issues surrounding life or death decisions in a healthcare context from a Catholic perspective. I hope it finds its way on to many reading lists and that it is read as widely as it deserves to be. Any introduction leaves much more to be said (in this case not least from a specifically theological standpoint), but a good introduction can help dispel pseudo-questions and direct our attention to the real matters of substance. Even those who would disagree with the conclusions of some sections of this little volume can welcome the clarity with which the arguments are set out. This makes it possible to disagree and to see where and why one disagrees. For someone who agrees with the conclusions presented, it provides not simply a stock of useful arguments, but further, a profound understanding of what human values are at stake. The fundamental issue is nothing less than a matter of life and death.

DAVID ALBERT JONES OP

**A BRIEF, LIBERAL, CATHOLIC DEFENSE OF ABORTION** by Daniel A. Dombrowski and Robert Deltete *University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2000. Pp. 168, £17.00.*

As the title suggests, this book is a defence of abortion in what the authors see as Catholic terms. They regard the views of Augustine and Aquinas on delayed hominization as 'one of the best kept secrets in the history of Catholicism'. There is, they think, a 'pressing need for something like [this] book', which defends not only delayed hominization, but abortion on demand before the foetus is between 24 and 32 weeks old. Late in pregnancy the foetus has the same moral status as the non-human animal; abortion at this stage is wrong unless (e.g.) the child is seriously disabled. However, early in pregnancy the foetus is compared to 'grass' or a 'plant', and its life is not seen as calling for any particular respect.

The book begins with a description of the views of Augustine and Aquinas, the latter more clearly in favour of delayed hominization than the former. The authors state correctly that abortion, for Augustine and Aquinas and for the Church in general, was seen as immoral in terms of sexual ethics, quite apart from the question of killing a child with a rational soul. In a later chapter, the authors set out their own sexual ethic which is (not surprisingly) fairly broad-minded. Pornography is fine in moderation, as are contraception, homosexual sex and premarital sex (the latter can, indeed, enhance a 'rich spiritual life'). The authors' description of sexual ethics of a more traditional type is, to put it charitably, confused: sex must be 'for the purpose of—or at least with the possibility of—pregnancy'. Moreover, there is, the authors suggest, no room in traditional sexual ethics to condemn non-

contraceptive sex of a kind which exploits the other person: a suggestion which hardly does justice to the views of Aquinas, let alone to Catholic sexual ethics in its most developed form.

Lack of space precludes a discussion of the authors' views on hylomorphism. Suffice it to say that they claim that any combination of hylomorphism with immediate animation requires the existence of a homunculus with a brain. To the objection that the embryo's genetic constitution is the epigenetic physical basis of its later development, the authors reply that a human organ also has a human genetic constitution, thus ignoring the distinction between an organism and its parts. Twinning and early miscarriage are cited in support of delayed animation, with no indication that these phenomena are readily explicable in terms of the reproduction and/or death of an embryonic child. While the rate of miscarriage is high in some (though not all) estimates, so is the rate of infant mortality in some countries today. Do children in such countries have a lower moral status than children in the West, simply because their long-term survival is a rather chancy affair?

One of the most striking features of the book is the absence in the bibliography of some of the most perceptive writers on abortion and the status of the embryo. No mention of Patrick Lee's book, or Stephen Heaney's (though a paper by Heaney is cited without comment). No mention of Grisez, Finnis, Fisher, or (on the scientific front) Serra, Colombo, Suarez, Irving or Kischer. Pro-life feminism does rate a mention, though only in relation to one author. However, there is, astonishingly, not a word said about the impact of abortion on women in emotional terms: an impact which is the subject of a harrowing international literature. Those women who regard their dead children as something considerably more than 'cut grass' will see a bitter irony in the authors' claim that *refusing* an abortion is 'cruel'.

From any point of view, the book is deeply unimpressive, redolent not so much of the academy as of the TV debate. The tone is often flippant to the point of vulgarity, as when the book refers to a 'Holy Crusade' against abortion. Again and again, the authors display an exasperating naivete. Do they really believe that Aquinas's views on ensoulment are unknown to educated Catholics? That a subject of rights must *take* an interest, not just *have* an interest? The book's treatment of these and other subjects is deplorably scrappy: issues of the utmost importance are simply brushed aside. To return to interests: the authors have an interest in confronting the arguments against their own position; an interest which this book has done nothing to promote. If, as they say, the authors admire their opponents' concern for innocent human life, they owe themselves, not to mention their readers, a careful and honest inquiry into the grounds for this concern.

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