Book Review of] *Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion*, by Harry Harris

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and without them it would cease to exist as that object, then these are the properties that an object has essentially. With this basis established, Brody sets out to determine what properties are essential for being human and at what point does a fetus have these properties. He rejects the theory that the fetus is human at the moment of conception; for although the biological characteristics of the fetus have by then been determined, it does not follow that the fetus already has all these properties. "What the fetus has is the chromosomal mechanism by which the properties are finally produced. Therefore, it does not follow that the fetus out of which "A" will develop is identical with "A" and, like "A," is a human being."

Brody takes his stand concerning the beginning of human life from the opposite spectrum, through an analysis of death. Arguing from recent studies about the time of death, Brody says, "The traditional definition of death, we could all agree, needs to be modified one more time to read: a person is dead only if there has been an irreparable cessation of spontaneous and natural cardiac and respiratory functions and there has been an irreparable cessation of brain function. But suppose we have the latter condition without the former one, wherein the brain has ceased to function but the heart and lungs have not... is the person dead if his brain has suffered irreparable and massive damage whatever the state of his heart and lungs?" To this question, Brody would say yes, and so he concludes that there is only one property which is essential to humanity and that is the possession of a brain that has not suffered an irreparable cessation of function.

He then maintains that the fetus acquires the potential of essential humanity when the fetus actuates the structures of a functioning brain, which comes at about six weeks. While traditional Catholic thought would push back the time of personhood even further, Brody's position is certainly more plausible than the Supreme Court's which has evaded the issue or put humanity at the time of viability; and Brody's chapter on "Abortion and the Supreme Court" is a lucid and logical critique on the Court's shoddy thinking in this area.

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Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion
Harry Harris

101 pages. Harvard University Press, 1975. $6.00

In a very few pages, Harry Harris, Galton Professor of Human Genetics, University of Lon-
which should be valuable to any
generalist who has an interest in
genetic defects. The writing style
is clear, direct and easy to fol-
low.

Professor Harris defines the
framework of his position at the
beginning in his Introduction. He
recognizes that the introduction
of precise techniques for the pre-
natal diagnosis of a variety of dif-
ferent genetic defects represents
a new departure in medicine not
because of the nature of the tech-
iques but because of the objec-
tive at which making the diag-
nosis is aimed.

Professor Harris attempts to
choose neutral language. He uses
the term "selective abortion" for
that carried out specifically be-
cause the foetus has been shown
to be either affected by or having
a high probability of being affect-
ed by a particular abnormality.
He also distinguishes between in-
fants and children on one hand
and foetuses on the other because
of the desirability of differentiat-
ing clearly between the infant or
child after birth and what it is at
an earlier stage of development.
It is strange that Professor Har-
ris, renowned as one of the
world’s leading medical genetic-
cists, ignores that the difference
in time and place that the stages
of development represent be-
comes a criterion for separating
the affected foetus from the hu-
man family and from human con-
cern. Thus, the terms he prefers
are no less loaded than the ones
that stress the humanity of an
unborn child in the intrauterine
stages of development.

The book defines the scope
of prenatal diagnosis describing
techniques of amniocentesis and
tissue culture as well as distribut-
ing pregnancies having the great-
est risk of involving a severely
abnormal foetus into four main
diagnostic categories. These are
(1) chromosome abnormalities
diagnosed by cytogenetic tech-
niques; (2) X-linked disorders
where sex determination is the
guide for action; (3) ‘Inborn er-
ers of metabolism’ depending on
specific enzyme assay or other
biochemical characteristics; and
(4) neural malformations such as
anencephaly or spina bifida where
estimation of alpha-foetoprotein
in amniotic fluid is informative.
Effects on the incidence of ge-
netic disease of prenatal diagnosis
and selective abortion of abnor-
mal foetuses are discussed con-
cisely but thoroughly.

On ethics, Professor Harris
uses the forceful arguments of the
human geneticist Lejeune, discov-
er of the chromosomal basis for
mongolism, to expound the tradi-
tional view that abortion is mor-
ally indefensible. He fails to
achieve balance because of the
advocacy of “selective abortion”
that permeates the book. The tra-
ditional position is characterized
by words of vaguely negative con-
notation such as “absolutist” or
“pat moralizing.” Although ac-
knowledging that Lejeune has
been careful to avoid taking his
stand on the basis of religious
doctrine, Harris defines Lejeune’s
position as identical with the
orthodox Roman Catholic position, the party line of orthodox intellectual abortionism. He declares that moral attitudes toward abortion of the medical profession and other leading sections of established society in England and most parts of the U.S.A. have undergone almost complete reversal in one or two generations without stating the basis for his generalizations. His suggestion that those who would protect the lives of the genetically-defective unborn are less aware of the social impact of such abnormal members is trite.

Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion can be a useful book but the effect of such a book on a generation of medical students and doctors trained in medicine without an ethic could be disastrous for an unsuspecting society.

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Legal Challenges to Behavior Modification: Trends in Schools, Corrections and Mental Health

Reed Martin

Research Press, 2612 N. Mattis Ave., Champaign, Ill. 61820. 1975, VII + 179 p., $5.95

Behavior modification has come under considerable legal attack in settings ranging from prisons to schools, and techniques ranging from psychosurgery to token economies. The issues are difficult and varied, and the disputes they have occasioned are not likely to be easily resolved. Books which attempt to summarize legal developments in this area for "the practitioners of behavior change and the administrators of such programs in public institutions" are therefore to be welcomed. The danger in any such book, however, is that complex issues will be made to appear simple, and that general statements of the "law" will sometimes be more misleading than informative. While much of this book is insightful and of high quality, it is marred by its conceptual approach, its uncertain organization, its uneven organization, and its uneven documentation.

The major difficulty arises from the attempt to treat behavior modification problems generically, dealing with programs in "schools, corrections, and mental health" as if the legal issues involved did not vary significantly, depending upon the program's setting. This problem is especially troubling in the chapters on consent and records. What children, prisoners, and mental patients can consent to varies widely from state to state, yet this fact is not mentioned. The chapter on rec-