

N.C. Lund-Molfese and M.L. Kelly (eds), *Human Dignity and Reproductive Technology* (University Press of America, 2003), 121 pages

Reviewed by Juliana Weber

Symposium papers delivered at the Integras Institute in March 2002 have been re-organized here into three thematic sections: 1) cultural notions of human dignity and reproductive technology; 2) the proper role of modern science with a view to preserving the sanctity of human life; and 3) the political and legal context in which the debate is taking place. Some papers struggle a little against the time that has elapsed since the papers were published, most notably in their silence on the recent challenge of ANT-OAR, but the entire book presents at least a good exercise in how to think and argue about the issues, if not also a most current grasp of the issues.

Patrick Guinan writes an historical introduction, placing the papers within the context of philosophy and science. In particular, he presents a useful historical understanding of notions such as rights and technology. Rights were once understood as based in nature, whereas they are now understood as based in legislation or contracts. In other words, modern rights exist only after they are asserted. Technology, likewise, once attempted to improve man's life within the limits of what he ought to tinker with, whereas now, technology is more widely understood as man's ability to perfect himself by himself alone. In these few words, Guinan introduces the over-arching theme of the conference, which the various speakers detail in reference to their particular topics.

Part I opens with Bethke Elshtain's "The Body and the Quest for Control." If we take the project of perfecting ourselves to be limitless, then we reject creaturely finitude. The body becomes mere property, the project and product of the individual. Control of this kind always means manipulation and elimination of unwanted products, a lack of acceptance for what has been given (p. 5). Standing in opposition to this notion of self-mastery is a notion of freedom within creaturely dependency. Elshtain argues that it is the given limit of what is "natural," the moral limit from time immemorial, which allows us to accept all persons regardless of their needs without finding them too burdensome or wondering whether they would have chosen not to be born.

John Haas's "The Magisterium on the Cutting Edge: Evangelization and Culture" continues the logic of the previous argument with a discussion of materialism as it has robbed man of his (participatory) dignity, kidnapping him from the context of creation, rendering him no longer intelligible or awe-inspiring. In Haas's view, when we reject God and the sacred, we necessarily reject an intelligent order to things, a *nature* of things. This is the logical upshot of a public debate that suppresses all language of the spirit and the divine. The new rule, he explains, is choice, which takes a few forms in our culture: relativism, utilitarianism, human autonomy, etc. (p. 30). Our culture does still pursue human goods, but only in a disordered way, which Haas

predicts will continue until a new evangelization puts human nature and sin back in the public vocabulary.

Steven Bozza wraps up Part I with “Human Dignity and Reproductive Technology: Pastoral Implications,” a highly compassionate essay that ranges from the nuptial meaning of the body to the stages of grief for couples that find themselves infertile. The final stage of grief is hope, which Bozza takes to mean a re-envisioning of the couple’s fruitfulness and the whole vocation of their marriage. The theme of acceptance and creaturely limits reappears in Bozza with the note that children are a gift, not a right or a commodity. It undermines human dignity to try to bring new life into being outside the marital act, because this is our creaturely limit (p. 41). Bozza offers and explains the following principles of discernment to guide couples in making reproductive decisions (after the objectively disordered options are ruled out): the dignity of the man and woman on all levels including emotions; the good of their marriage and the marital act; and the stability of their finances (pp. 42-43).

Part II also consists of three papers, beginning with Daniel P. Toma’s “What’s Wrong with Biology and Biologists? The Remote Roots of the Moral Crisis.” For Aquinas, knowledge starts in the senses, and faith builds on knowledge; also, things more remote to the senses are known on the basis of things more commonly known. For Stephen J. Gould, however, a science of facts is separate from a faith of morality and values (p. 51). Gould represents the current dominant position. Toma thinks that the difference between Aquinas and Gould lies more in their *approach to nature* than in their respective beliefs about God or scientific method. Gould assumes, without defense, that there is nothing real besides matter (p. 52). Furthermore, the standard science textbook begins with tiny pieces of matter, D.N.A. or atoms, and works back up to a whole deer or blade of grass by the end of the book. This flips on its head the traditional method of approaching nature. Psychology usually follows this example by beginning with animal behavior or abnormal human behavior in order to explain normal psychology; there is no understanding of human intellect, so there can be no understanding of morality by the time the microscopic building blocks have added back up to a whole man. Every evidence lodged against theism, Toma argues, is a product of this backwards approach to nature and can be answered on those grounds (p. 65).

Patrick Lee is charged with the wide task of delineating the front-line trenches in the debate about the “The Moral Status of Human Embryos.” He argues that the lines in the sand have less to do with souls than they have to do with *embodiment*. The pro-choice side of the argument tends to equate personhood with consciousness (p. 72), whereas pro-lifers see the body or life as the most important point. Denial of personhood at conception is a logical result of the premise that we are not our bodies, that we came to be sometime after conception and/or became intrinsically valuable sometime after conception. Lee’s response to this is a discussion of kinds

and degrees of potentiality, and how to distinguish the embryo from his mother both in his potentiality and in his activity.

Part II ends with William E. May's "Begetting vs. Making Babies." For May, "making" is primarily about the product, whereas "begetting" is about the actors and their perfection as moral agents. Marriage makes a couple fit for procreation in the way that studying medicine makes one fit to diagnose a patient and prescribe treatment. *Making* a baby *via* a *technician* is dehumanizing for the human product on account of the unfit activity and unfit actor, so it can never be morally justifiable. In contrast to this, May discusses the Trinity in whose image we are made. The Son is not made but begotten "by an immanent act of personal love" (p. 91). Our dignity is respected when we likewise beget (and refuse to make) human life. We have no right to children; desires simply do not justify every means to attain a thing (p. 92).

Part III consists of only two papers. Richard M. Doerflinger opens with "Retrospective and Prospective: The Public Policy Debate on Embryo Research." He begins his historical survey in the 1970s with federal funding and limits placed on IVF, the presidents and their appointed ethics panels, and other issues such as cloning. "Every major federal advisory group that has defended destructive human embryo research... has conceded that the early embryo is a developing human life, and has even said that this life deserves some measure of 'respect'... [but that] some human lives lack 'personhood'... so the 'respect' we owe to these human lives is outweighed by the benefits we can hope to gain by disrespecting and destroying them" (pp. 100-101). This finding certainly adds weight to the previous papers' discussions of personhood.

Doerflinger points out bad arguments on both sides of the political fence: Clinton's committee wanted to fund embryonic stem cell research only if less problematic research would not be as productive, but adult stem cell research has called this policy into question; Bush's administration allowed federal funding for research on existing stem cell lines so that no new embryos would be destroyed, but it admitted that, if the research proved fruitful, private investors would then jump on board (p. 103). While Doerflinger's future predictions can only be guesses, the few years since he delivered this paper have been eerily obedient: he predicts the patenting and marketing of embryos, using embryos for organ harvesting, and eventually large-scale genetic engineering. Doerflinger also tips his hat to Lee Silver's prediction of a future caste system based on genetic enhancement.

The final paper in this collection belongs to Bradley and concerns "The Constitutionality of Recent Pro-life Legislation," a discussion of the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, the Born Alive Infants Protection Act, and the Human Cloning Prohibition Act, all of which appear to Bradley to be constitutional. UVVA makes a clear allowance for *Roe v. Wade*, and it challenges none of the logic of that decision. *Roe v. Wade* made no ruling about the beginning of life, nor did it attempt to solve the question of personhood. Since UVVA does not override the mother's choice,

its parameters fall entirely outside the scope of *Roe v. Wade*. BAIPA. is safe on the same grounds, because *Roe v. Wade* consistently ruled in favor of the choice of a *pregnant* woman, even though most of the detriments to her that are listed within the decision concern the raising of a child. It remains consistent that *Roe v. Wade*, throughout, concerns pregnancy. BAIPA. absolutely respects the boundary that defines actual life beginning at birth. Finally, HCPA. seems safe, since the Court has not established a right to clone, nor a right to IVF. In order to win an argument on the grounds of privacy, the asserted liberty must be deeply rooted in our nation's tradition and history, and it must be described in specific, concrete terms. If IVF should be approved on the grounds of privacy, it would have to be defined so narrowly as to exclude cloning, so that cloning would require its own trial. In that way, it seems HCPA will be safe for a while.

In all, this is an excellent collection of papers from which a wide audience could benefit. Where "recent" pro-life legislation is a bit dated, Doerflinger's predictions benefit from the decade of hindsight, and Bradley's remarks still represent clear thinking on the subject at hand. These papers would be especially useful in a classroom setting.