

accuser la nature d'avarice, de méchanceté et d'impuissance" apparaît au contraire, grâce à Darwin, comme "la loi providentielle par excellence, la loi d'économie et d'abondance," montrant du même coup la fausseté des lois civiles et politiques, de même que la morale religieuse qui, par une "protection inintelligente accordée exclusivement aux faibles, aux infirmes, aux incurables, aux méchants eux-mêmes," perpétuent les maux et augmentent le mal aux dépens du bien. "Charité imprudente et aveugle," écrit Clémence Royer. "Fraternité obligatoire" fondée sur une erreur: "On en arrive à sacrifier ce qui est fort à ce qui est faible, les bons aux mauvais, les êtres bien doués d'esprit et de corps aux êtres vicieux et malingres." Sous prétexte d'égalité, on condamne l'espèce à la "révélation irrationnelle de la chute."

Pour moi, concluait Clémence Royer, l'intrépide, je crois au progrès. Il est vrai qu'elle avait dit aussi: "je ne trouve pas nécessaire, quant à moi, de discuter mes droits, quand il ne dépend que de moi de les prendre." Geneviève Fraisse remarque: "Toute sa vie, en effet, est en accord avec cette lettre." Toute sa vie et une grande partie de sa pensée! Comme quoi il n'est pas si simple de vouloir devenir le Pygmalion d'une science qui pose à la question séculaire de la justice tous les défis naissants du darwinisme social.

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Ethics and Human Reproduction: A Feminist Analysis.
Christine Overall. *Allen and Unwin, 1987.*

This book responds to an important need in philosophical ethics. A significant number of contemporary philosophers has already ventured into the sensitive and widely expanding area dealing with the ethics of human reproductive practice and technology; many others can be expected to join the debate over the next few decades as technology continues to radically change and challenge our views on human reproduction. As Overall accurately observes, most of the philosophic comment to date has been from either a nonfeminist or an antifeminist approach. Reproduction, and our societal attitudes toward it, profoundly influence the lives of women. Hence, reproductive practices cry out for a feminist philosophic analysis. Overall's book, like Gena Corea's powerful and influential work, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), provides a thorough, systematic, *feminist* analysis of a variety of medical-social practices and attitudes having to do with human reproduction.

Overall begins by indicating the sense she attaches to the "feminist" aspect of her approach. For her, a feminist account involves "a commitment to understanding women's experience, beliefs, ideas, relationships, behaviour, creations, and history." It includes an understanding of the fact that women are oppressed under patriarchy, and a conscious ideal of avoiding further aspects of patriarchal oppression. While I am not sure she is right that a feminist analysis also requires a theoretical account of the origins of the oppression of women, I do agree with her claim that a feminist account must deliberately be striving for an end to sexual inequality and oppression.

In attempting to comply with these guidelines and with her further goal of evaluating issues in reproduction in terms of their effect on the well-being of women and children, she distinguishes her own approach from any other analyses of human reproduction found in philosophy. Those which ignore women's perspective and do not actively recognize and address the oppression of women in our society, she describes as nonfeminist; those which actually deny that women are oppressed under patriarchy and seek to preserve various existing sex differences perceived as being "natural" are labelled antifeminists. Clearly, a feminist approach to reproductive ethics can be expected to differ considerably from both nonfeminist and antifeminist analyses. This account differs from other philosophic analyses of reproductive ethics, both in subject matter, *i.e.*, the problems considered in need of examination, and in the specific analysis of each problem, including the factors considered relevant in the discussion of a problem area. For instance, as Overall notes, the philosophic literature to date on reproductive issues has focused on the issue of abortion, and both nonfeminists and antifeminists have addressed that issue almost exclusively from the perspective of the fetus. Her commitment is to explore the whole area of reproductive ethics, attending to the experience and well-being of women and children.

The issues she tackles include sex preselection, the status of the embryo/fetus, abortion, childbirth, "surrogate motherhood," infertility and artificial reproduction, and the question of whether there is a sense in which we have a right to reproduce. Her general view is that women must be given increased control over their own reproduction, and that they ought not to be viewed as being in a competitive relationship with their (prenatal) offspring. Nonetheless, she also believes that embryos have a certain moral status from the moment of conception, and that a woman's control is limited to determining what happens within her own body.

I find the book well researched and documented; it is a useful source for anyone seeking a clear, reliable survey of

the literature addressing these problems, and it provides an insightful analysis of the issues. In the chapter on childbirth, for example, she documents the increasingly common medical view that women are in conflict with their fetuses, posing risks to helpless embryos who, therefore, require physicians' protection. She challenges this perspective which conceives of childbirth as a competition between the interests of mother and fetus to be refereed and managed by the physician, and she demonstrates the dangers of these sorts of assumptions in the heavily medicalized Western approach to childbirth. Risks in childbirth, in Overall's view, must be evaluated by the pregnant woman herself, since such evaluation must be done in the context of the wider circumstances of her life.

The specific feminism underlying the various chapters leans to what is generally seen to be liberal feminism in the common taxonomy of feminist theories (liberal, Marxist, socialist, and radical). She is highly respectful and largely uncritical of individual decision-making in reproduction, and strives only to avoid policies that will support the coercion of women into specific choices which are exploitative or otherwise oppressive. She persuasively criticizes both free market analyses of surrogate motherhood and feminist analyses which see surrogate motherhood as a form of prostitution on the grounds that both accept the perspective that surrogacy may be treated merely as a sort of job. She sees the commodification of pregnancy and babies as the core problem of surrogacy, and we must wonder whether her solution of non-enforcement of surrogacy contracts and prohibition of advertising for surrogates is adequate for the threat surrogacy poses to social conceptions of women and their role in reproduction. In the final paragraph of the chapter on surrogacy, she points towards a more radical solution in which the social context of reproduction is changed so that it "is no longer labour performed by women for the benefit of men, and...the social conditions which create the demand for surrogate motherhood disappear." A more radical feminist analysis would spend far more time exploring and supporting these final claims and considering how we might bring about such profound social change.

Her chapters on sex preselection and artificial reproduction address the variety of experience which may lead people to seek the relevant medical technology. She does indicate the ways in which the underlying desires may well be suspect in that they derive from unacceptable assumptions about gender, genetic links with the children we might parent, and/or the importance of reproduction in the social roles of women and men. Overall is also sympathetic to those seeking these sorts of technological interventions, providing charitable bases for their interest

wherever possible, and she is willing to tolerate individual pursuit of these technologies as long as we, as a society, do not encourage or support their development and spread. She denies that anyone has a right to such services (though she does rightfully criticize current discriminatory practice which provides them only to middle class women in stable, heterosexual marriages); but she stops short of prohibiting sex preselection, *in vitro* fertilization, ova donation, and embryo transfer altogether, since sometimes (if rarely) these are compatible with genuine desires of individual women. Many other feminist authors (myself among them) have argued that we must go further and refrain from permitting these activities entirely, since individual interests do not outweigh the overall danger to the interests of women and children in a society that pursues such practices in even a limited way.

The most difficult area of Overall's analysis arises in her discussion of the status of the embryo and fetus. Like other feminists, she recognizes that women's freedom depends on our reproductive freedom, and reproductive control requires access to abortion (though she stops short of supporting abortion on demand, suggesting that abortion can be wrong if, for instance, the pregnancy was planned and her reasons are frivolous). She argues that abortion is restricted to removing the fetus from her body; it does not involve seeking the death of the fetus, should it survive expulsion. There are two reasons cited for this limitation: first, an important element of her analysis is a resistance to the commodification of reproduction and its products. She argues that reproduction and the embryos and children it produces ought not to be seen as commercial objects to be purchased or owned. Hence, the embryo/fetus is not owned by anyone, not even its mother. I agree completely with this aspect of her analysis. I do, however, have reservations about the conclusion she draws from this critique to the effect that, because she does not own it, the woman cannot control what happens to the embryo when it is removed from her body. My concerns have to do with her second reason, that the duty of nonmaleficence (to do no harm) is fundamental, and her belief that killing constitutes a harm to the embryo.

I agree that embryos have interests that ought to be protected, but I do not agree that these interests are always best served by protecting their lives. What, after all, is to become of a fetus that survives the process of extraction from the womb? Presumably it is to be treated as a premature baby and placed in an intensive care neonatal unit. Very premature infants tend not to survive despite the use of expensive technology, and those that do, run a very high risk of being severely mentally and physically handicapped. Even those that survive intact may, in some cir-

cumstances, have some difficulty in having good homes found (e.g., if they are of minority races or if the mother carried some genetic disease or was a known substance abuser). Some social circumstances may be so oppressive that the mother can predict only a life of extreme hardship for her offspring, e.g., if she is a black mother in South Africa. If we consider practices which affect embryos early in development, “surplus” embryos produced by *in vitro* fertilization or “embryo flushing” may be in demand from couples with a distorted sense of the fetus as commodity, or whose heterosexists bias reflect parental values the mother finds unacceptable for child-rearing. (For a truly frightening version of a foreseeable *Brave New World* of reproductive control in which one would not want one’s children to be raised, see Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.)

Hence, it is not only ownership that might lead a woman to want her embryo or fetus destroyed if she was no longer prepared to nurture it, but also her vision of threats facing the developing child. An analysis attentive to the interests of children and women, as Overall insists is necessary, must recognize that protecting the interests of the embryo does not necessarily mean preserving its life. I think embryos are entitled to what philosophers call a “paternalist” approach in which others must decide the best interests of the developing organism; and it is legitimate (and compatible with Overall’s general theme that the interests of fetuses ought not to be viewed as being in conflict with those of their mothers) that the person who has the most intimate relationship with the fetus and who has the most invested in its development—*i.e.*, the mother—should be the one to decide on how its interests may best be served.

Moreover, while her recommendation to allow the mother to expel the fetus if she finds continuing pregnancy unacceptable may be logically consistent with her view that no one has a right to secure the death of that fetus, in practice this separation is dangerous to feminist aims. As Overall acknowledges, surviving abortion may produce further harms to the fetus which, inevitably, put the woman in conflict with the fetus in the case of abortion. Surely, such conflicts will again be considered as adequate grounds for restricting women’s access to abortion. The difficulty here is that Overall has strayed from her vision of seeing reproduction as a process with mother and fetus conceptually and physically connected. For women, reproduction is far more involved than simply housing the fetus, and it makes a mockery of their concerns to imagine a social practice that can bring about the independence of the fetus when the mother determines that the pregnancy can no longer be tolerated but is unwilling to surrender the care of the fetus to the state. I believe

women are in a privileged position with respect to the fetuses developing in their bodies, and that, in most circumstances, they are entitled to decide the future of those fetuses. This is not because they own the fetuses, for they ought not to be free to sell them, but because they are responsible for them and should be trusted to decide if continued life when removed from the womb is in the best interest of the fetus. Any other policy, especially any which insists on trying to save every premature infant no matter how damaged, or which allows the patriarchal state to determine the survival question, would be contrary to the interests of women and children. Only the mother is likely to make such decisions in a loving way (since I believe death can be a loving decision). Without the authority to decide these questions women will not have the reproductive freedom necessary, and, in particular, they will certainly have difficulty in getting abortions.

Despite my disagreement in these important areas, I wish to recommend Overall’s book with enthusiasm. It is well written and very well conceived. It is important to consider these various aspects and practices of reproduction in conjunction with one another. Together they constitute our attitudes about reproductive matters and about those persons most closely involved in reproductive activity, women and children. Hence it is important to discuss the issues in a comprehensive fashion, being sensitive to how our attitudes in one area influence developing practice in another. In particular, her discussion of the dangers of sex preselection and surrogacy help clarify the need to avoid a simple analysis of consumer choice as the foundation for reproductive freedom in matters of childbirth and abortion. The choice feminists are arguing for must be viewed as a comprehensive control over the reproductive aspects of our lives in a manner compatible with the autonomy of other women and children. This book helps us to clarify that goal.

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The Science Question in Feminism. S. Harding. *Ithaca: Cornell University, 1986, Pp. 271.*

In *The Science Question in Feminism* Harding takes on the most thorough analysis of feminist critiques of science to date. Harding does this through a discussion of what she considers to be the five main research problematics of feminism and science. Her most important contribution to these projects comes in her discussion of the future of science. As a standpoint theorist, Harding accepts that