

Short literature notices

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Harris, J.: 2007, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 260 pages. ISBN 978-06911128443. Price: € 26.99.

John Harris' new book "Enhancing Evolution" is provoking and thought-provoking since it makes an "ethical case for making better people" (intended as an ethical, not a policy proposal). It is provoking since it deals with two hotly debated ethical problems: the question of enhancing human beings and the moral status of the human embryo, and it deals with these problems in a clear language attacking a lot of deeply rooted moral intuitions surrounding human nature or the value of the given. Harris' claims must be provocative since he claims that enhancing persons is a moral duty because enhancing a life of a person (or the person itself—Harris does not make a clear distinction here) means making that life better for that person herself. And it is a moral duty, at least *prima facie*, to enable persons to lead better lives. Although Harris does not discuss his own meta-ethical stance in detail, it is obvious that he does not accept deontological arguments as sound moral arguments. Thus he attacks philosophers like Michael Sandel or Jürgen Habermas criticising their arguments as inconclusive or unclear and not universally accessible (the reader must get the impression that in this book only the meta-ethical stance of Harris is accepted as universally acceptable).

As a liberal, Harris accepts that other persons (among them prominent philosophers like George Annas, John Finnis or Leon Kass, to mention a few) will reject enhancement for themselves, but refuses to accept that these thinkers want to prescribe what other persons should be allowed to do on the basis of rationally not justifiable

premises. Relying on human nature is, according to Harris, no plausible basis for making enhancement unethical. On the one hand, evolution is a process wherein each stage of development is contingent and subject to random change. On the other hand evolution's results can, if enhancement is possible at all, be enhanced. Since making persons' lives a better life for them is a moral duty, enhancing evolution is ethically mandatory and the evolutionary given human nature is of no intrinsic value. Moreover, since evolution itself will not shrink from overcoming obstacles, then preserving human nature cannot be morally mandatory.

For sure, some of the arguments in this book are not elaborated carefully enough. For example, Harris rejects potentiality-based arguments presupposing a notion of potentiality which would make this notion useless for science, too (cf. pp. 97 and 166 ff.). If I am right in assuming that biology cannot do without a notion of potentiality, this result is unwelcome and I cannot see how Harris can avoid this without weakening his objections against using the notion of potentiality in biomedical ethics. But Harris' plea for enhancement is not only provoking. It is really thought-provoking since it demonstrates how deep the philosophical issues are and that we have to address them if we want to make explicit all the metaphysical, meta-ethical and ethical premises all participants in the debate rely on. But without such philosophical reflection a serious and fruitful discussion will not be possible. It is among the merits of this extraordinarily well written book to make this visible.

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Taylor C., Dell'Oro R. (eds.): *Health and Human Flourishing. Religion, Medicine, and Moral Anthropology*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. 296 pages. ISBN 978-1589010796. Price: € 22.99.

This book is a collection of essays exploring the contribution that theological anthropology can make to biomedical, clinical and research fields, and to policy debates. Theological anthropology is concerned with the value of humankind and human history in relation to God. The authors focus on the Christian faith as the lens through which decisions about bioethics can be made. To this end, they appeal to the Roman Catholic tradition. Theological anthropology is used as the tool to construct an approach to health research and the delivery of public health services.

The book presents provocative arguments that stimulate the reader to consider the place of vulnerability in clinical practice and for the understanding of public health issues. The text is divided into 5 parts. The question about the boundaries of theological anthropology and its relevance for bioethics is addressed by Dell'Oro. Other contributions are those by Desmond on pluralism and truthfulness in the doctor-patient relationship, and by L. Carse, who analyzes the human affliction between the vicissitudes of fortune and the compassion for the limits of control. In the second part, the contributions by Sulmasy, Mohrmann and Holland try to explain why dignity and integrity should be seen as *intrinsic* values of human beings. Part 3 analyzes the concept of vulnerability. Toombs reflects about the meaning of illness. Zaner proposes a meditation on vulnerability and the power for establishing a dialogue and awakening a moral sense. Lysaught is in favour of overcoming the anthropology that dominates medicine and bioethics, which "too often reduces human identity to rationality and autonomy individualistically construed" (p. 159). Part 4, on relationality, examines the dimensions of sexual and social anthropology comparing theological aspects with the cultural and social components of bioethics. The penultimate chapter by Hamel proposes the expansion of moral imaginations so that future health policy choices will not be lamented.

In part 5, Carol Taylor, one of the coeditors of the volume, writes about the importance of calibrating our moral compass: "A Christian theological anthropology views humans as finite creatures of a loving creator, called to be cocreators of this world, and ultimately destined for the full perfection of human life—not in the here and now, but with eternal union with God" (p. 228). This belief is seen as the foundation for all health decisions, whether they are individual treatment choices, the provision of health care, or health research. Soble Cahill highlights the value of the Catholic social tradition, resulting from *Rerum Novarum* and *Gaudium et Spes* as a rich reservoir for developing a practical theological bioethics.

The final contribution by Pellegrino draws conclusions with anthropological value for bioethics and in defence of human beings, stressing that the reasons of ethics must be based on those of being: "For better or worse, we have the power to alter our biological makeup in still unimagined ways. Without a clearer idea of what man is, we will enter and remain in a dark moral forest without a compass" (p. 267)

In conclusion, this book is an important contribution for public health debates against the moral minimalism that dominates much of conventional bioethics. It calls attention to the intrinsic value of the human condition and of human flourishing, and provides an antidote to the reduction of morality to universal and minimal principles. In this sense this volume is an essential tool for understanding bioethics as "a commitment to the anamnesis of meaning" (p. 2).

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Marx-Stölting L.: 2007, *Pharmakogenetik und Pharmakogenetests. Biologische, wissenschaftstheoretische und ethische Aspekte des Umgangs mit genetischer Variation*. Berlin: LIT Verlag. 312 pages. ISBN 978-3825896546. Price: € 29.90.

Pharmacogenetics is an expanding field of research combining pharmacology, genetics and medicine. Lilian Marx-Stölting explores the state of art of this new science, estimates its potentials and evaluates them from an ethical point of view. By publishing this in-depth analysis she counters unrealistic visions, hopes and fears and assists to a serious scientific and public discussion on pharmacogenetics.

The book consists of two main parts: First the author presents the scientific background of genetics, pharmacogenetics and clinical application of pharmacogenetic tests. She concludes that science has to deal with an enormous complexity by having only statistical evidence for effective therapy. The reduction of human qualities to only genetic parameters is mistaken, since emergent properties are not explicable from the DNA structure and the phenotype is only in rare cases (e.g. monocausal diseases) a necessary consequence of the genotype. The effect of clinical intervention depends furthermore on external factors like compliance, attitudes, and environment. Therefore pharmacogenetics may be only one of many aspects in improving therapeutic intervention.

For the ethical analysis Marx-Stölting uses the principle of Beauchamp and Childress as a convergence approach to evaluate goals, means, and consequences. In doing so she introduces a fifth principle: the preliminary principle of considering the social consequences of a