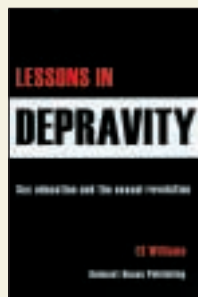


# BOOKS

## Lessons in Depravity – Sex Education and the Sexual Revolution



*E.S. Williams*  
Belmont House  
Publishing 2003  
£8.00 Pb 328pp  
ISBN 0 529939 5 3

The bulk of this book comprises a painstakingly detailed

account of the sexual seduction of our society over the past two centuries by sexual revolutionaries from Robert Owen (1771-1858) to Gill Frances of the present-day National Children's Bureau.

It is a valuable resource book for specialist readers, tracing not only the key players but also highlighting their tactics - 'values clarification' replacing a Christian moral framework, promotion of adolescent sexual activity as a given norm, and the hijacking of terms such as 'family' to promote an overtly anti-marriage agenda. The sacrifice and personal suffering of those who dare oppose the sex education lobby also comes across very powerfully, especially in the chapter on Victoria Gillick.

Five major deficiencies of the book sadly minimise its impact however. First is the book's presentation and style. Excessive detail and page after page of dense text unbroken by subtexts or headings will put off all but the most determined of readers (or reviewers!).

Secondly, Dr Williams attacks his fellow Christians with the same apparent ease that he berates the sexual revolutionaries. Anyone who, like myself, knows the opprobrium and vitriol which the Family Planning Association (FPA) have poured upon those involved in developing CARE's sex education resources will recognise something is adrift when the author asserts, 'The British Government, the IPPF, the FPA, Brook and CARE all teach sex education in a framework that is either indifferent to, or ignores, biblical morality'. CARE is not alone in bearing William's wrath either - Oasis Trust, ACET, the Christian Institute and indeed every Christian organisation that I can think of

trying to apply biblical wisdom meaningfully to sex education, is undermined by the author's failure to make any distinction between such groups and the sexual revolutionaries they oppose.

Thirdly, there is an element of implicit coercion in the book, which demonises choice. On numerous occasions, Williams castigates all who seek to help young people make 'informed choices'. He sees choice as an unbiblical concept *per se*. What then are we to make of God himself offering his people a choice between life and death and who does not makes their choices for them? (see Deuteronomy 30:19, Joshua 24:15). Surely it is better to use opportunities to inform young people about the joys of sex within marriage and the dangers of sex outside it, than to leave the field to those who will feed them the entirely opposite information that Dr Williams so rightly condemns? We cannot compel others to obey God's law.

There are also some disturbing inconsistencies in the book. For example, whilst others are chided for using medical and health reasons for promoting abstinence rather than quoting the Bible, the author himself gives many pages to explaining the failures of condoms and the havoc wrought by sexual infections and unplanned pregnancies. Quoting the Bible

## AFTER THREE HUNDRED PAGES OF CRITICISM, THE AUTHOR HAS LITTLE HOPE TO OFFER FOR ANYTHING BETTER

and using pragmatic arguments are not mutually exclusive - both are needed.

The greatest weakness of the book however is that after three hundred pages of criticism, the author has little hope to offer for anything better. A mere two pages at the end suggest that 'just as parents do not need to teach their children to walk or talk, for they learn these skills naturally as they grow older, so they do not need to teach children the details of sexual

physiology, for children come to understand their sexual nature as they mature into adulthood'. I wonder if the author adopts the same 'head in the sand' approach about geography? We do need to teach our children about sex and we need to do it in a way honouring to Christ in a society that is increasingly hostile to biblical standards. The stark 'black and white' cover of this book suggests that the author lives in a world where everything is clear-cut. For those parents like myself, who need to find the Lord's help in many grey areas in bringing up our teenagers, this book will offer little practical assistance.

*Trevor Stammers is a General Practitioner in West London who writes and broadcasts on sexuality. Reprinted with kind permission from Evangelicals Now.*

## Caring for Jewish Patients



*Joseph Spitzer*  
Radcliffe Medical Press  
2003  
£24.95 Pb 232pp  
ISBN 1 85775 991 5

An Orthodox Jewish man leaned out of a cubicle in casualty, pointed directly at me

and bellowed, 'He can examine me!' As a clinical student who happened to be passing through, I felt rather bewildered when the frustrated casualty officer persuaded me to yield to this unexpected demand. The patient had not allowed anyone else to approach him. He mistakenly assumed my features were Jewish. 25 years later, I wonder about the implications of informed consent!

Dr Spitzer's excellent book explains the cultural perspective which impelled the patient to act in a determined way. It is an enlightening aid especially for those working in areas with a high concentration of Jewish patients. The author is a General Practitioner, an Orthodox Jew serving a very traditional Jewish community in North London. This volume is rooted in his personal understanding and professional experience, often punctuated with lively and revealing anecdotes.

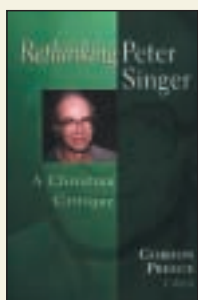
# BOOKS

This account examines the attitudes and responses of Jewish patients to life, family, disease and death. Using the traditional Orthodox community as a benchmark, Dr Spitzer allows the reader to extrapolate firmly held beliefs and practices into Jewish communities whose interpretations are more liberal. We discover the profoundly religious obligation to seek medical help, often misunderstood by non-Jews as hypochondriacal or obsessional behaviour.

For those interested in biblical history and Judaism, the first part of the book is one of the best summaries of Jewish history, tradition and thought that I have read. Definitely for Christians whose theology of mission sits more easily with the Messianic end of the spectrum rather than that of 'Jews for Jesus'. Although there is some repetition and at times the prose is a little turgid, I can thoroughly recommend this book. Working in a North London Practice with Jewish colleagues and a large number of Jewish patients, I will encourage staff, students and registrars to learn from Dr Spitzer's insights.

*Paul Dakin is a GP in North London*

## Rethinking Peter Singer



*Gordon Preece (Editor)*  
InterVarsity Press 2002  
£9.89 Pb 180pp  
ISBN 0 83082 682 3

Peter Singer is arguably the world's most famous contemporary philosopher. He is currently Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, and well known for his support of abortion, euthanasia and infanticide. He has also been vocal about his opposition to 'speciesism' - the preference of human interests over those of other animals.

*Rethinking Peter Singer* is a long overdue examination of Singer from a specifically Christian angle. Gordon Preece and colleagues from Ridley College, an Anglican theological college in Melbourne, Australia, attempt to engage with Singer's writings and offer an evangelical critique of

his work in a series of five essays.

Singer has been praised for his adherence to his ethics. However, in the first essay Preece notes that much of his philosophy is not only opposed to our moral intuitions, but is 'unthinkable' and ultimately 'unliveable' in daily life. The book sets much of Singer's work in the context of his life, and Preece cites the often highlighted inconsistency of his refusal to agree to euthanasia for his mother suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Although Singer's views appear counterintuitive, Andrew Sloane points out that they are consistent with his theories. Preference utilitarianism, which underpins his philosophy, deems that any action is right if it furthers the interests of as many

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as possible of those affected by it. However, Sloane argues that this is intrinsically unsound, and fails to defeat alternatives, advocating an objective moral order with emphasis on actions, not consequences.

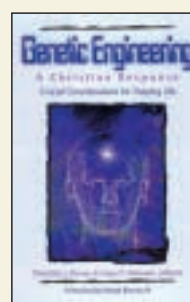
The two most helpful chapters are those tackling Singer's criticisms of Christianity and his views on personhood. As an outspoken atheist, his rejection of Christian scriptures is not surprising, but Graham Cole demonstrates how he caricatures the Christian position, making selective use of the Bible to support his cause.

I've heard Christians argue that it is impossible for us to engage with Peter Singer as his views are light years away from our own. However, others believe that Singer has made a major contribution to the Judaeo-Christian position by demonstrating the logical, 'unthinkable' alternative to our ethic. Indeed, Singer's aim is to do away

with traditional theories, such as the sanctity of life principle, which represent 'relics' of the Christian view. With this in mind, we must understand his arguments and the theories supporting them. This is no bad place to start: as Gordon Preece himself puts it, '[this book] represents a religious determination to stay put and debate with the high priest of secular ethics'.

*Helen Barratt is a clinical medical student at Imperial College, and Editor of Nucleus*

## Genetic Engineering – A Christian Response



*Demy TJ, Stewart GP (Editors)*  
Kregel 1999  
Price \$22.99 Pb 320 pp  
ISBN 0 8254 2357 0

This multi-author volume has three sections examining genetic engineering and society, the family and the individual. Each chapter can be read in isolation. Some general comments:

- The title is misleading – 'genetic engineering' implies the manipulation of genetic material but instead of considering all aspects of this (eg. the development of GM crops), this book deals entirely with human and medical genetics, specifically the potential impact of the human genome project.
- The science is a little dated (book is copyright 1999) but the principles still apply.
- Considerable space is given to reproductive issues and is therefore as relevant to the Christian obstetrician, midwife and reproductive medicine specialist as to the geneticist.
- The book is geared towards an American audience with an entire US authorship. Health insurance features prominently in the discussions of confidentiality and discrimination and



even prenatal diagnosis. Patenting is examined from theological, social and US legal perspectives. A history of the US eugenics movement is provided.

Are there issues and principles on which the authors seem agreed?

- There are real dangers philosophically and practically if genetic causes of disease and behaviour are over-emphasised.
- There was a consensus against termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality, agreement regarding life as beginning at conception and opposition to procedures that result in the destruction of early embryos.
- In general, the human genome project does not raise new ethical issues but amplifies existing ones. The potential abuse of genetic knowledge is seen in the context of the prevailing post-modernist philosophy. The book provides no new insights to these problems but it is helpful to have the arguments (scientific, biblical and ethical) laid out clearly.

For me, there were some surprises in the book. One author would not rule out future germ-line therapy or genetic enhancement and also suggested that genetic counsellors should reject non-directive policies (admittedly her work in cancer genetics allows greater scope for being directive). Another author agreed that some types of genetic enhancement are not so serious as to warrant prohibition. As for cloning, more than one author had an open mind – one chapter ends with the statement that ‘as long as there are no embryos left over to be thrown away and none destroyed in the process there is no reason why cloned embryos cannot be used to enhance infertility treatments’.

Whilst personally I have quite a few

reservations about this book, it remains a stimulating read and could be used as a primer for church or Christian medical groups in discussing a number of both practical and theological issues.

*Alan Fryer is a Clinical Geneticist in Liverpool*

## For What it is Worth: the Status of the Human Embryo



*Philippa Taylor 2002  
Available from the  
Centre for Bioethics and  
Public Policy and online  
32pp  
ISBN 0 90519 505 1*

When does human life begin? What or who is a human being?

This concise booklet addresses these questions, which are fundamental to the biotechnology of human reproduction, including pre-natal and pre-implantation diagnosis, assisted reproduction, human embryo research and cloning.

Five chapters examine ‘The Beginning of Human Life’ from different perspectives and a glossary of technical terms and appendix of further reading resources are included. Chapter 1 looks at biological aspects, giving evidence that a new human embryo comes into being at fertilisation. Chapter 2 concerns theological aspects, demonstrating that the whole consensus of biblical teaching is that human life begins at conception. Biblical theology emphasises that the status of human beings depends on the fact that they are created ‘in the image of God’ and not on their attributes or functional abilities. ‘The human embryo, at its earliest stage in existence of the human being, already carries the rights and dignities which membership of this most special species entails. Biblical testimony

walks hand in hand with the evidence of biology. The supreme man, the man who was also God, began his existence at this point too.’

Chapter 3 is in question and answer format, and addresses common objections, part A on biological or scientific grounds, and part B on the question of personhood. Objections quoted and answered include: ‘Bearing in mind the high natural loss of fertilised ova, I find it hard to believe that they are of any great importance to God’ and, ‘An embryo is only a potential human being before 14 days, although it may be accorded “profound moral respect”’. Chapter 4 gives some applications and the question we should ask of any proposed technique: ‘What is this technology doing to human dignity?’

Chapter 5 summarises the conclusions. ‘There is no point from fertilisation onwards at which we can reliably conclude that a human being is not a member of the human family, and who is known and called by God, one with whom we are locked in community.’ We face a battle of worldviews but we can have confidence in the Christian worldview. As John Wyatt, Professor of Neonatal Paediatrics, indicates: the Christian worldview is true, fitting with science and reality; it works, leading to beneficial consequences for individuals and humanity; it feels right, in accordance with the deepest intuitions of the human heart.

Christian thinking emphasises our responsibility to care for and protect vulnerable, weak and defenceless human beings including the embryo and human foetus (Proverbs 31: 8-9). I would highly recommend this helpful booklet to all CMF members. Even those who hesitate to accept its basic thesis will find food for thought and a challenge to apply radical biblical reasoning to contemporary bioethics.

*Stephen Browne is a General Practitioner in Birmingham*

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