

Bioethics at the Movies

Sandra Shapshay (Ed)

- The Johns Hopkins University Press 2009
- £14.00 Pb 380pp ■ ISBN 978 0 80189 078 9

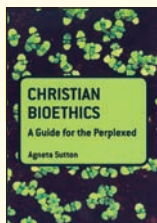
This collection of philosophical essays by academics grapples with ethical topics through the medium of film. The essays cover issues such as abortion, personhood, cloning and identity, memory, euthanasia, eugenics, autonomy and paternalism, using well known films such as 'I, Robot', 'Wit', 'Gattaca' and 'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind', as well as more obscure ones like the Japanese anime 'Ghost in the Shell'.

The level of discussion is high, with most contributors coming from a secular academic tradition. I found it particularly stimulating to have two essays examining the same film but from different points of view.

For example, one used Clint Eastwood's 'Million Dollar Baby' pro-euthanasia while a second criticised the film's portrayal of disability as a 'living death'. My only negative comment as a film lover is that the essays are much more about ethics than film, and at times the film analysis is fairly scanty.

If you like thinking about ethics and enjoy movies then this book is made for you. I found it stimulating, and each chapter has discussion questions that could be used equally well in the classroom or after watching a film at home with friends.

Dr James Paul has an MA in bioethics and works at L'Abri Fellowship, Hampshire



**Christian Bioethics
A Guide for the Perplexed**

Agneta Sutton

- T&T Clark 2008
- £14.99 Pb 180pp ■ ISBN 978 0 56703 197 6

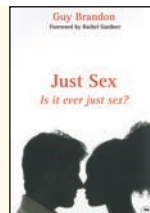
Christian bioethics grow ever more complex as technologies develop and new issues emerge. Agneta Sutton has set out to make some of the themes more accessible. She takes a broad sweep, encompassing traditional challenges such as euthanasia and IVF, as well as more novel topics like our role as guardians of creation and how we should treat animals, not addressed in other books.

The book is well referenced and draws widely on a variety of predominantly Catholic texts to support and explain her argument. However, this is perhaps a book for those who already have some knowledge of the discipline, rather than readers looking for an intro-

duction. For example, on the beginning of life, Sutton starts from the premise that human life begins at the point of fertilisation. She thus seeks to critique arguments in favour of life beginning at another point in development, for example implantation. Sadly, arguments around life beginning at fertilisation are not considered in real depth.

This book sits alongside others that seek to make bioethics more accessible to a wider Christian readership, and its breadth in terms of subject material and external references is its main strength.

Helen Barratt is an SpR in public health in London



Just Sex - Is it ever just sex?

Guy Brandon

- IVP 2009
- £9.99 Pb 224pp ■ ISBN 978 1 84474 371 1

This is vital stuff' says Romance Academy director, Rachel Gardner, in her foreword and so it is. As the author, a theologian at Cambridge's Jubilee Centre, clearly recognises, it is also a book many readers may consider 'hard-hearted' because it concentrates so much on the societal rather than individual aspects of sexual behaviour. Sadly, for many people today, 'personal liberty is so important that they may feel relational disorder and pain are a worthwhile price to pay for it' (p192). GPs will not be alone in recognising that truth reflected in their surgeries every week.

The book is written with the unbelieving reader in mind as well as the Christian, though I

suspect most secularists in our sexually obsessed society will find it highly unpalatable. However, those who can digest it will find a wealth of helpful well-referenced material on a wide range of sexual issues. The book's unique feature is to locate these within a wider framework showing how society, government and church can powerfully influence – for good or ill – the sexual behaviour of individuals.

Just Sex is a bit like the written equivalent of a cold shower, but sometimes they are just what is needed.

Trevor Stammers is a GP and Lecturer in Healthcare Ethics, St Mary's University College, Twickenham



Too Much, Too Soon

The Government's plans for your child's sex education
Norman Wells

- Family Education Trust 2009
- £2.50 Pb 52pp ■ ISBN 978 0 90622 921 7

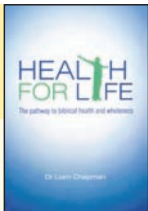
Sex education, argues the Director of Family Education Trust, is not just another aspect of education, but 'an ideological battlefield on which a war is being waged for the hearts and minds of children'.

This new booklet explains the government's current plans to make sex education compulsory from the age of five. It was written to answer the questions of bewildered parents. It outlines the current situation regarding sex education in schools, and explains how and why sex education campaigners want to see it become part of the national curriculum. The author argues that the government's

reliance on earlier sex education, more contraceptive advice, and informed choice is failing young people. He warns that parents are being squeezed out and undermined, and that sex education may break down the natural inhibitions of children with regard to sexual conduct.

He concludes that we need to speak to children honestly and modestly, to give clear moral direction, and to encourage respect for both marriage and parents. This small booklet is a gift. I strongly recommend it.

Liz Jones has retired from community paediatrics in Newcastle upon Tyne and is a trustee of Lovewise



Health for Life

The pathway to biblical health and wholeness
Liam Chapman

- Trafford Publishing 2008
- £8.99 Pb 181pp
- ISBN 978 1 42517 627 3

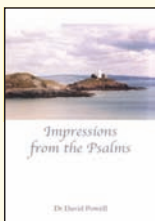
As both medical doctor and Christian minister, Dr Chapman is well placed to bring an integrated, whole person perspective to this book on biblical health. It is divided into four sections: biblical health, health of the spirit, health of the soul, and health of the body. This is a practical workbook with scriptural quotes, questions for reflection, and space to write personal thoughts at the end of each chapter. I found it easy to read with an attractive layout. It makes no attempt to be an exhaustive manual on this complex subject, but the broad and generalist approach prevents the reader becoming bogged down. References are

provided for deeper study.

I dozed off when reading lists of essential nutrients (did you know walnuts are a common source of coenzyme Q10?) but enjoyed the chapter on laughter and its benefits. The chapters on rest, stress, and ageing found me reading slowly and reflectively with a clear sense of God's revelation and challenge to obedience. What would elderly men change if they could have their life over again? They would rest more, reflect more and risk more.

This is a wise, informative and practical overview of biblical health in the 21st century.

Chris Atkins is a GP in Sheffield



Impressions from the Psalms

David Powell

- Powell Charity Trust 2009
- £5.99 Pb 152pp
- ISBN 978 0 95623 360 8

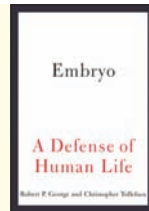
These 'impressions' by a retired CMF member give a very helpful synopsis of the psalms.

The psalms express challenges and provocations which the biblical David experienced as shepherd, army commander, refugee and sovereign. Unlike those times we are not so involved with 'flesh and blood' controversies but with 'the powers of darkness in this world and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms'. These include political correctness. From his background of service in the Royal Navy, extensive senior appointments in pathology, and valued preaching in many churches, David

Powell's impressions condense and make relevant to modern Western life the psalmist's sensibilities of life.

The psalms reflect the depth of personal relationship available between man and the Creator. In addition to the 'impressions' from each psalm, there are relevant and inspiring brief quotations from Scripture or hymns which enhance the concise summary of the psalm itself. This is a good digestive ingredient of our 'daily bread', the Word of God passed down over thousands of years and still essential for today.

Keith Sanders was General Secretary of CMF from 1974-1990



Embryo

A Defense of Human Life

Robert P. George and Christopher Tollefsen

- Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group, USA 2008
- \$23.95 (USA) Hb 242pp
- ISBN 978 0 38552 282 3

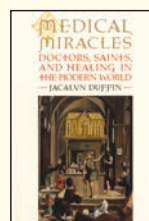
The book opens with the attempt to rescue some IVF embryos from being destroyed in the flood caused by Hurricane Katrina. One embryo rescued that day was successfully implanted and 'Noah' was born in January 2007, named because he survived the flood! The book begins with the intuition that it was Noah who was rescued that day. That embryo was him, in the first fragile days of his existence.

The rest of the book is a philosophical defence of the claim that a human embryo is the first stage of life of a human person. George and Tollefsen consider in detail many arguments and counter

arguments, and provide a useful resource to sustain the 'life begins at conception' view.

My concern is that this book is too abstractly rational. It even abstracts out the mother and her relationship with her child! It creates the absurd impression of an embryo as an independent creature, when the human embryo is us at our most dependent. Avoiding religion, for good political reasons, the book somehow misses the human and emotional. I do not think this book will move those who do not already recognise the humanity of the embryo.

David Albert Jones is Professor of Bioethics at St Mary's University College, Twickenham



Medical Miracles

Doctors, Saints and Healing in the Modern World

Jacalyn Duffin

- Oxford University Press 2009
- £15.99 Hb 285pp
- ISBN 978 0 19533 650 4

Historian and haematologist Dr Duffin diagnosed severe acute leukaemia from a bone marrow sample. Surprisingly the patient survived, following prayers to a woman 200 years previously who had become Canada's first Catholic saint.

This led Duffin to explore the Vatican Secret Archives. Four purported miracles must lie behind every 'saint', but unlike Lourdes, Vatican records are shielded from public scrutiny. Indeed all details of Vatican healings since 1939 are 'sealed'. She was, however, able to examine papers from 1588 until 1939, covering 1,400 'miracles'. As the revolution in diagnostic imaging is

only 40 years old, her study reveals the history of medicine, but little in the way of hard science.

In fact, she persistently fails to ask the hard questions. Was she being gullible to believe these stories? What happens to those who stop medication? Why are these stories so different from the Gospel miracles (which she ignores)? Neither does she apply any rigour in asking what might constitute a miracle.

So she notes (without comment) that her leukaemia patient also received 'aggressive chemotherapy'. Then wherein lies the miracle – or the saint?

Peter May is a retired GP in Southampton