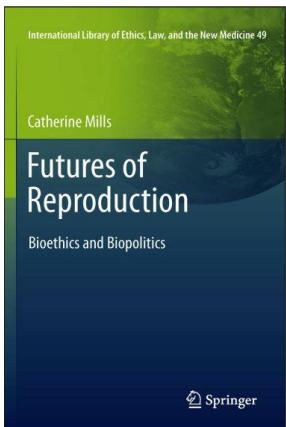


Cosmin Lazar



Review

Catherine Mills, Futures of Reproduction. Bioethics and Biopolitics

*International Library of Ethics,
Law, and the New Medicine, 49,
Springer Verlag, Dordrecht
Heidelberg, London, New York,
2011, pp. 134.*

Reviewed by

Rev. Cosmin Lazar

Dr. Catherine Mills from the University of Sydney, Australia, is primarily interested in issues in bioethics, particularly relating to reproductive and genetic technologies, along with aspects of contemporary European philosophy and feminist theory. She has published works on the concept



Rev. Cosmin Lazar is PhD Student at the Orthodox Faculty of Theology of the University "December 1st 1918" of Alba-Iulia, Romania

of biopolitics, particularly in the work of Agamben and Foucault, as well as on concepts of responsibility and embodiment in relation to technology.

This book draws on contemporary continental philosophy and feminist theory, especially the work of Foucault, Derrida, Butler and Cornell, to address issues in bioethical debates around reproductive technologies and genetics. The book has six chapters and final remarks: 1. Introduction; 2. Normal life: liberal eugenics, value pluralism and normalisation; 3. Reproductive autonomy as self-making; 4. The limits of reproductive autonomy: prenatal testing, harm and disability; 5. Reproducing alterity: ethical subjectivity and genetic screening; 6. Ultrasound, embodiment and abortion. Each chapter is followed by conclusions and references.

The starting point in addressing this issue is related to the report of a prenatal diagnosis revealed after a scan of morphological foetus in the nineteenth week of pregnancy. The genetic scan revealed a small risk of Down syndrome, but also the circumstance that the foetus was missing his left hand. Although parents received counseling and were referred to a clinic specializing in postnatal care, they decided to turn to abortion. From the case files was revealed that the mother was heavily influenced by the fact that the foetus was female.

The diagnosis problem of disability foetus role in decisions about abortions is discussed in this first introductory chapter by two approaches: the first one is supported by Dr Julian Savulescu who believes that the only criterion in determining the ethics of abortion is maternal interest consistent with the values and personal beliefs of the mother and the second approach proposed by Frank A. Chervenak and Laurence B. McCullough, who recommends that obstetric ethics operate on a principle of anatomy to ensure the integrity of the patient's values and moral perspective on the basis of account (healthy) that requires the doctor to act in the interest of patient and foetus, following the viability (of foetus) to play the lead role in establishing the politic body of human being of foetus.

The author of the book consider that the two approaches have apparently a neutral solution relying exclusively on maternal interests. In fact, first exclude all other considerations, and secondly because in this case the foetus is not viable and mother withdraw his moral status due to her personal interests. It is necessary, therefore, that the morality of such an abortion practice to be designed within a framework of general rules. It is observed that there exists a conflict between disability and sex of the foetus that underlie to the decision of the parents and therefore it is important to argue in what conditions a disability is serious enough to lead to abortion. The case is especially troubling because of questions raised over the selection of future children, in the sense that reproductive decisions will be taken in line with the development of genetic diagnostics or preimplanting which do nothing but restrict human sensitivity reffering to acceptable bodies.

In this perspective, dr. Catherine Mills examines the ethics of reproductive decisions in terms of social norms inspired by the work of theorists like Michel Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy and Judith Butler to extract from these resources, the potential value of a human appropriate reproductive ethics. She also examines the possibility of a new way of thinking of reproductive ethical practice offered by the opportunity of new reproductive techniques, especially over the debates given by liberal eugenics.

Contemporary bioethics is now faced with dilemmas raised by new reproductive technologies and genetic screening implying a sex selection, prenatal identification and preimplanting of carrier genes, whether they are or not eugenics. Approaching the contemporary liberal eugenics understood as opposed to the Nazi eugenics considered reprehensible and unacceptable, according to the author must be reconsidered in view of options that are to become possible. The possibility of these options aims at a moral and political recovery of the concept of eugenics. The idea behind the eugenics is adding the term liberal that turns on from a negative doctrine to one morally

acceptable and is based on two important principles that are interconnected: value pluralism and moral and political priority of individual freedom. Furthermore, there are two ways in what concerns the individual freedom. The first concerns the freedom of parents to make reproductive decisions unencumbered by legislation, and the second relates to the future freedom of the children resulting from these decisions known as the phrase „entitled to an open future”. If proponents of liberal eugenics focus on parental liberty, critics point out that the right children may suggest constraints on parental freedom. Do not forget here the principle of evil or injury which alongside by pluralism of values and individual freedom is actually the aim of the first three chapters of this book. In the last part of this introductory chapter, Catherine Mills gives a definition of the term biopolitics interpreting Foucault's vision of his book „History of sexuality”, in which he talks about the new form of understanding of Western policy on the one hand due to the emergence of disciplinary technology oriented toward the learning to master the force, on the other side with a policy of life directed towards enactment and administrating public life such as creating the term of biopower.

In the second chapter of this work, the author approaches the problem of value pluralism as it appears in relation to human development focusing on interpretative concept of normality by integrating biological and social rules. One of the current concern is related to the role that normal human person has in debates on genetic interventions and the central point is the dispute over standards of normality opportunity to dissect the acceptable moral practices from unacceptable in a way that liberal pluralism of values can be maintained without yielding to the relativistic libertarianism¹.

¹ In the most general sense, libertarianism is a political philosophy that affirms the rights of individuals to liberty, to acquire, keep, and exchange their holdings, and considers the protection of individual rights the primary role for the state. This entry is on libertarianism in

Those who argue in favor of liberal eugenics, as the philosopher Nicholas Agar, primarily use two fundamental principles of liberalism: value pluralism in relation to good and priority of individual freedom. If totalitarian eugenics was characterized by compulsory and interventionist role of the state in shaping the reproductive choices of society, liberal eugenics enlarges the scope of reproductive freedom by minimizing the state settlements and compelling the reproductive options. Hereinafter, Catherine Mills argues that liberal eugenics proponents do not take into account in an appropriate manner the importance of social norms in shaping individual decisions. In the second part of this chapter the author develops various hypotheses on normalizing critics outlined by Foucault on liberal eugenics. It also emphasize the fact that a concentration too activist on social norms can marginalize the importance of rules inherent of the body with reference to health and normality. It provides an alternative thinking on the idea of normal human being analyzed through the complex interaction of social and biological rules. This idea allows the recovery of normal ethics without idealizing outer standards according which abnormal bodies are considered to be inadequate. As Joanna Zylinsta argued to be for or against human improvement is a matter unsustainable but the ethical burden in relation to this improvement is knowing how to differentiate normal conception.

In the third chapter, the author discusses the issue of individual freedom as the second principle of liberal eugenics. In developing this principle it uses criticism of John Stuart Mill that, the only freedom which deserves the name is to get our own good in our own way. It also argues that the only justification for limiting freedom is to prevent injury or harm done to others. The correct understanding of reproductive

the narrower sense of the moral view that agents initially fully own themselves and have certain moral powers to acquire property rights in external things.

autonomy as a positive freedom is vital for adopting reproductive decisions. Of course this freedom must be accepted in a particular way as a practice of self-formation in the sense of ethical interpretation sustained by Foucault. The approach proposed by dr. Mills applies for allowing a more profound significance in human life so that to answer at reproductive problems intuitive in terms of the personal nature of the individual when it comes to reproductive decisions. Of course that new reproductive practices determine a questioning of freedom by challenging its limits.

In the next chapter the author deals with problems related to reproductive autonomy limits: prenatal testing, harm and disability. So that in the area of reproductive ethics the theoretical debates approach the idea that evil principle represent a way to limit reproductive freedom. At the same time, Catherine Mills points out here that parents who try to bring children into the world in conditions considered to be disabled. She also examines the arguments of consequentialism² in Harris's view, Savulescu and Glover who are unanimously agree with the fact that parents are certainly free but forced to choose the child with the best prospects of life. Discussions around the problem of evil and disability lead to the conclusion that the latter limits the reproductive freedom but was in constant tension with the arguments that support it. The second part of this chapter is devoted to expressivist criticism of prenatal tests. This criticism is based to the assumption that, life without disabilities can be valuable and appreciated. Prenatal tests debate separately a particular feature then supporting the whole person and in association

² In actual usage, the term consequentialism seems to be used as a family resemblance term to refer to any descendant of classic utilitarianism that remains close enough to its ancestor in the important respects. Of course, different philosophers see different respects as the important ones. Hence, there is no agreement on which theories count as consequentialist under this definition.

with the consequences of birth, provides the basis for that life with a disability to be suppressed. In this synecdoche direction, prenatal tests to detect disability repeat a central feature of a more general discrimination, where a person claims feature but can also lead to its destruction. In his plea, the author defends criticism expresivistă against James Lindemann Nelson's arguments rejecting this type of ethics because prenatal tests that allow parents to choose abortion if a fetus with disabilities express a message offensive to people with disabilities. In fact in this chapter dr. Chaterine Mills brings into focus two issues that will be discussed in the next chapter. The first aspect is related to social issues that was born around discussions on prenatal testing and disability, and the second aspect relates to the issue of the ethical significance of human relationships.

In this penultimate chapter of this book, the author canvas the fundamental interests of reproductive decisions and how selected health technologies can have an impact upon these decisions. In this way she approaches two type of arguments: an argument related to moral of a natural type, recommended by Michael Sandel, and an argument of a moral conception of human nature held by Jürgen Habernas. Both aspects can be seen as responses to the dangers of liberal eugenics. PGD³ technique can contribute to a change in moral self-knowledge in the sens that allows a change from the uniqueness of foetus to determination of certain features incorporated into newborn. This type of biotechnological technology may describe both dangers and promises.

³ Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD or PIGD) refers to genetic profiling of embryos prior to implantation (as a form of embryo profiling), and sometimes even of oocytes prior to fertilization. PGD is considered in a similar fashion to prenatal diagnosis; when used to screen for a specific genetic disease, its main advantage is that it avoids selective pregnancy termination as the method makes it highly likely that the baby will be free of the disease under consideration.

The last chapter of this book ,the seventh, analyze the interaction between social norms and ethics of reproductive technology. Mills argues that obstetrical ultrasound in the way in which are presented, have a sympathetic impact on patients who form their decision and the abortion debate. In this circumstance is shaped the image of the normal or abnormal foetus and expectant parents are asked to decide on the continuation or termination of pregnancy. On the other hand the attitude against abortion has exploited ultrasound ability and 3D and 4D images to focus on the facial features of the foetus and to emphasize the vulnerability and the need for protection of the foetus. Assuming this vulnerability as important defining characteristic is involved in the feminist ethics and abortion. Generally it argues that reproductive technologies contribute actively to what singnify a healthy life framed in social life.

At the end of the book, Catherine Mills confesses that the book and the personal interest is to analyze how the theoretical debates and ways of thinking shape reproductive decisions of people in contrast to the rules that compell parental imaginative possibilities.