

The Abortion Myth

by Leslie Cannold; Allen & Unwin, 1998; 152 pp; \$16.95 softcover.

This is an excellent book about the abortion debate and should interest anyone who values enlightened discussion of this complex issue. As suggested by her title, Cannold takes up the challenge of questioning traditional pro-choice and anti-choice concepts of abortion and constructs a more focused determination of women's reproductive freedoms and choices. Central to her argument is how the issue of morality has been used selectively in the abortion debate. Anti-choice women assert that the foetus is a person, and as such has a 'right' to life. Thus, to abort the foetus is to kill, and is therefore immoral. Pro-choice women assert that a women's 'right' to control her body overrides the right of the foetus. The author argues that by using rhetoric that promotes the foetus and morality, the anti-choice movement has effectively appropriated the debate from pro-choice women. She also suggests, however, that pro-choice reliance on underplaying the moral dimensions of abortion, by choosing to reduce the importance of the foetus, fails to satisfy many of the ethical dilemmas associated with abortion.

Cannold asserts that any compromise in the debate will be unachievable while the following difficult questions remain unanswered: Are there 'irresponsible' pregnancies? Even if women have a right to choose abortion, is it always right for them to do so? Which reasons for having an abortion are bad ones? Does the foetus matter? How much? And why (p.xxxvi)? In her view, the moral uncertainty that surrounds these questions allows the anti-choice sentiment to gain ground. In order to retain women's reproductive freedoms she argues that abortion politics need first to allow women to have ambiguous feelings about abortion. Only then, she asserts, can they still be in favour of choice, still make the decision to have an abortion and still support those who have abortions.

Cannold sets the scene for the book by first introducing the reader to the process of ectogenesis which involves the gestation of a very young foetus in an artificial womb. This process was proffered by ethicists Professor Peter

Singer and Deane Wells as a solution to the abortion impasse. They argued that if pro-choice women had this ectogenetic solution available to them then they would be able to end an early pregnancy without killing the foetus and thereby retain control of their bodies. A decision to do otherwise therefore would be unethical.

In response to this speculation, Cannold undertook a study of 45 women in Australia of child-bearing age representing both the anti-choice and pro-choice sides of the abortion debate. The study's aim was to determine, through interview, their views and experiences of abortion and ectogenesis. Interview excerpts are interspersed throughout the text allowing an objective narrative for which Cannold is to be commended given the emotive nature of the subject. A criticism of the book would have to be the author's failure to disclose her methodology in relation to how the 45 women were chosen. Also, despite very bold statements of how many abortions and unplanned pregnancies take place each year in Australia, no sources are given.

The book engages the reader in a very brief journey through the intricacies of existing access to, and the legality of abortion in America, United Kingdom and Australia. In subsequent chapters the author examines the values women place on pregnancy and motherhood and develops a convincing argument for the need for women to be 'given the legal right and be trusted with the moral responsibility to say about becoming a mother yes, not now, not ever or never again' (p.130).

The author concludes that the solution of ectogenesis, rather than eliciting support from women generally, in fact did not stand up as a valid solution. Women do not want to relinquish their gestational responsibilities to an artificial womb because they feel that the unique relationship between mother and foetus created by pregnancy forms the cornerstone of women's responsibility-based abortion ethic. If women are to retain the power to be able to choose abortion in the event of unwanted pregnancy they must be

trusted to make the difficult decision of when they will become a mother. These women, regardless of their preferred position on abortion, shared in common the judgment that this responsibility is a moral issue and one that will invariably be directed by the circumstances of the individual. Cannold describes this responsibility as a women's moral agency.

In light of the recent Chan/Lee abortion case which led to parliamentary debate of abortion laws in Western Australia, this book is not only timely as a synopsis of the debate nationally and internationally, but offers fresh and substantial insight into the often rehashed issue of abortion. The author, by her own admission, is of pro-choice persuasion but succeeds in providing a very balanced account of opposing views throughout the book. Both proponents and critics of abortion should find this book a valuable contribution to the debate for its significant consideration of the ethical issues of abortion.

AINSLEY HARPER

Ainsley Harper is a postgraduate research student, Flinders University of South Australia.

The Adult Guardianship Experiment: Tribunals and Popular Justice

Terry Carney and David Tait; The Federation Press, 1997; 229 pp; \$35 softcover.

The term 'Adult Guardianship' refers to the legal appointment of a substitute decision maker for an individual deemed incapable of adequately determining her or his own best interests. This generally occurs in cases of intellectual disability or mental illness. The transfer of responsibility for personal and financial decisions is an area fraught with complex philosophical, moral, social, medical and legal issues, with many of these complexities and associated paradoxes captured in this book.

In *The Adult Guardianship Experiment*, Terry Carney and David Tait set out to explore the viability of using lay tribunals rather than courts to decide