

**Chapman, Audrey R. *Unprecedented Choices: Religious Ethics at the Frontiers of Genetic Science*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. 261 pp.**

Both the theme and *raison d'être* of Chapman's book are clearly expressed in her own words, "This study began with the affirmation that religious ethics can potentially make a significant contribution both to the religious community and to broader societal efforts to grapple with the choices and dilemmas arising from the genetics revolution" (p.207). One would be hard pressed to disagree with this sentiment, and Chapman is to be commended for providing both a resource and an impetus to the religious communities to take very seriously the implications of molecular genetics both in the field of bioethics and in that of theological inquiry itself.

Chapman's book seems easily divided into logical sections, (1) an introduction to the issue of modern genetics, (2) a brief review of the dialogue between religious communities and ethical issues surrounding modern genetics, (3) bioethical discussions of two specific genetic issues, cloning and the patenting of life, and (4) an overview of theological questions specifically arising out of the emerging science of genetics.

The first section, comprising a single chapter, provides what the author calls "The Framework." Here she sets the context for the reader. She provides a simple but more than adequate review of the present state of genetic science, and she does so in language that allows even the "scientifically uninitiated" to feel that they have grasped enough of the subject to enter the ethical discussions with a reasonable understanding of what genetic science thinks it knows. In this chapter she also points out the ethical dilemmas

emerging, and develops a logical argument that both demands that the voice of religious ethics is essential in this arena and that religious communities must take seriously their responsibility to enter this discussion more readily and more fully than they have in the last twenty years as the science of molecular genetics has been blossoming. In the second chapter she provides an overview of the responses by ecumenical, denominational, and individual theologians to the ethical discussions that have surrounded genetics in the last two decades. Chapters three and four deal more deeply with two ethical themes, cloning and patenting life, and are examples of what kinds of ethical questions continue to emerge from the new genetics and why the questions and discussions are of paramount importance to religious communities. Chapters five and six move away from specific moral analysis to step back and raise up some of the theological questions that seem to be emerging from the new genetics, specifically the theory of evolution, definitions of human nature, normative definitions of humanity, conceptions of sin, freedom, human essence and even soul. She concludes in chapter six with an evaluation of the literature from religious communities and the encouragement for contemporary religious communities and ethics to engage and reengage a dialogue with genetics because, "... as set forth in the various analyses of the unprecedented challenges and choices related to genetic developments ... [u]nless religious ethicists begin to offer guidance on how to respond to these developments, they may become irrelevant to shaping our genetic future" (p. 256).

Chapman's book has much to recommend it. It represents a competent and perhaps unique attempt to gather the voices of the international religious community as it has

attempted to address the ethical questions emerging from the fast paced developments of molecular genetics in the last decades of the twentieth century. It provides a fairly comprehensive introduction to a significant number of theological notions that are affected by the implications of contemporary genetics. It is ecumenical in perspective and is generally both sound in its scientific presentations and fair in its summaries of confessional positions. From a general perspective it could have benefited from material provided by the philosophy of science. Readers need to know that some fundamental questions with ethical implications can be found outside of the religious perspective. Some of these very legitimate epistemological concerns raised from the philosophical perspective provide very valuable support and confirmation to those arising from religious communities. Specifically, Chapman fails to review the horrors that arose from the misuse of Mendelian genetics in the first half of the twentieth century. These attacks on humanity were precisely the result, at least in part, of both the scientific and political communities epistemological naiveté (perhaps deliberate) about the limits of Mendel's laws. The most cogent attacks on the early twentieth-century eugenic movement were epistemologica

From a specifically Roman Catholic perspective, Chapman's work could be stronger in two areas. First, its interpretation of Catholic teaching seems to lack an understanding of the Church's respect for "reason" as a legitimate vehicle to acquire ethical truth. Thus I think the Catholic reader might find himself/herself uncomfortable with some of the interpretations of Catholic positions found in the book. Secondly, the book seems to refer to bioethics in general, and the ethical discussions surrounding genetics in particular, as late twentieth-century developments. However, this dismisses the long history of pastoral and moral medicine in the Catholic tradition going back at least to the late nineteenth century. Specifically one can find discussions arising from the use/abuse of eugenic measures in the early twentieth century in both the *American Ecclesiastical*

*Review and The Irish Theological Quarterly* prior to the development of molecular genetics spurred by the model of DNA proposed by Watson and Crick in 1954. Chapman could have added to the value of her work by presenting some of the discussions surrounding eugenics by the religious communities in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

In conclusion, I would recommend Chapman's book as an excellent introduction to the discussions of the ethical questions surrounding contemporary genetics. It provides a valuable summary in a respectful ecumenical context of the contributions of a number of religious voices. The book also provides a good introduction to the science of contemporary genetics. Finally the book offers the reader a wide selection of the kinds of theological questions that are raised by the new genetics. Both because the book presents foundational material and raises many more theological and bioethical questions than it answers, some might find it useful as a text for a graduate seminar, a vehicle for an adult education series, or to acquire a reasonable, ecumenical view of the state of the dialogue between religious ethics and the frontiers of genetic science.

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**Arthur J. Dyck. *When Killing Is Wrong: Physician-assisted Suicide and the Courts.* Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001. 127 pp.**

This book, although brief, is exceptionally valuable. Dyck offers incisive critiques of the reasoning used by federal judges and ethicists to support physician-assisted suicide (hereafter PAS). He then gives reasoned arguments to justify philosophically (1) the principles that now guide and support homi-