

BOOK REVIEW

In Search of Common Ground on Abortion: From Culture War to Reproductive Justice

West R, Murray J, Esser M (eds.). Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014. ISBN-13: 978-1-472-42046-6. Price: £25.00. Pages: 208 (paperback)

This is a book with seven chapters written almost exclusively by lawyers and based on a symposium for legal scholars held at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA in 2009.

The subject is abortion but the approach is entirely legal, philosophical, moral and political. Most chapters cite the law extensively: the footnotes sometimes extending more than half way up the page. Beware the sociolegal jargon: terminology such as countermajoritarian and commodificationist is going to deter a lot of readers. The proposition of opposing groups reaching common ground seems to me rather idealistic and to have little

chance of real success. I did not think there was much scope for common ground when an author could not support contraception, even as a means of reducing the number of abortions.

The book is, as might be expected, entirely US-centric. It has little relevance to societies with well-established state-funded social security and health systems.

I thought the views expressed about doctors and genetic counsellors working in termination for fetal abnormality were unduly negative. In most societies women are free to decide on whether or not to undergo tests for fetal abnormality and, when abnormal, to decide whether or not to act on the results.

The book touches on some quite interesting dilemmas, but hardly what is seen commonly in clinical practice. For instance, in cases of a pregnancy conceived after rape, how should the law treat women who choose to continue the pregnancy or the rapist's parental rights? Selective reduction of an *in vitro* fertilisation twin pregnancy from two to one in the absence of any

fetal abnormality or risk of a multiple order pregnancy is a challenging if rare moral dilemma.

I found the abstract analysis in the disability rights chapter very difficult to follow. I was not impressed by the uncritical mention of “post-abortion stress syndrome” in the chapter about supporting women in difficult circumstances who wish to continue their pregnancy.

I really cannot recommend this book for clinicians in sexual and reproductive health – unless of course they are embarking on non-medical academic studies of abortion.

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