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### [Book Review of] *The Ethics of Fetal Research*, By Paul Ramsey

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step toward emotional adjustment to their loss. Through the funeral, mourners can accept the reality of death; they can memorialize the person they love; they have a vehicle to express their grief, thus easing the burden; they receive solace and consolation from their friends and relatives; they are given hope through a religious liturgy.

Some would have us believe that the funeral director invented the funeral. Actually, the funeral has existed since the beginning of

recorded history. In a world of constant change and sophisticated scientific advancements, nothing endures long that has little value.

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## *Book Review*

### **The Ethics of Fetal Research**

By Paul Ramsey

*New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975.*

This recent publication by Paul Ramsey is an excellent accomplishment and is essential reading for obstetricians, pediatricians, and others involved in decisions in perinatal medicine. I am amazed that Dr. Ramsey has been able to review in such a concise way the many aspects of research upon the living human fetus. The book is well organized and presents the questions Dr. Ramsey poses in a rational and clearly understandable manner and attempts to provide some guidelines for resolution.

The first chapter offers a concise description of the background history and the current guidelines that have been proposed in this country and abroad. Early in the

book, an essential distinction is made between the ethics of research on the living human fetus and the question of the morality of abortion. In addition, there is a discussion of the analogies between the ethical problems posed by attempting research upon the living human fetus and research upon the condemned, the dying, and the unconscious patient. The last chapter in the book, on "Who Consents of Fetal Research?", is particularly good in outlining the dilemma of "proxy consent." It offers a useful discussion of the many ways in which consent could be obtained for the previsible, living human fetus to participate in research.

There are some other issues

that I think could have been amplified or introduced into the discussion in the book. For example, if parents have no moral right to give consent for research which is not directly to the fetus' or child's benefit — because they cannot presume to impose their morality upon the child; that is, they cannot assume that the fetus or child, if an adult, would consent as they might consent — then there are similar limitations upon the parents' right to refuse specific therapy to the fetus or child, based upon their own religious beliefs. The issue of "proxy consent" by parents for non-therapeutic, non-diagnostic research upon their offspring is a difficult one and seems to me to be at the heart of the difference between the position of some other theologians and Ramsey. If parents can say yes to those medical procedures which are "therapeutic" — that is, the procedures are directed at improving the growth and development of the child, a form of "biologic good" — can the parents then say yes to those actions which they believe enable the child to participate in his or her "moral good?" Within the Christian tradition, is there in fact any good that is derived by anyone at any age participating in a positive action which is non-willful or non-conscious on the part of the participant? His discussion of the dangers of such reasoning is perhaps the least settled and con-

vincing of the many issues he raises.

Finally, there might be some place for a discussion of the ethical obligation of the scientist to insure the quality of his research, even when the actions being carried out on the consenting patients are proper and without risk. This question of quality should be raised quite apart from review committees, peer groups, etc. These groups may or may not be effective. Insofar as our primary concern is the moral obligation of the scientist, the effectiveness of such groups is irrelevant. Where does the search for quality stop? How definitive must answers to certain questions be before protocols are carried out upon patients?

These questions by no means detract from the value of the book. Dr. Ramsey has written with thoughtfulness and clarity. I urge all physicians and other health professionals involved in perinatal medicine to read this book. It is "must reading" for them, and certainly for all who participate in decision-making about human experimentation which involves the fetus and mother.

**Reviewed by:**

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