

BALANCE OF RIGHTS AND DUTIES: A Book Review

THE BROKEN CORD by Michael Dorris.

New York: Harper and Row 1989.

I was impelled to read *The Broken Cord* after watching the author interviewed on a TV talk show and feeling the glimmer of recognition that as he spoke and wrote about "Adam" he may well be telling me something about one of our adopted grandsons.

The Broken Cord is an account of Dorris' struggle to understand, to find out more about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and to cope with his adopted son's malfunctions...an account that is told with such openness that it would engage the heart of any sensitive person whether or not those symptoms were found among his or her acquaintances.

But to recognize the possibilities for damage to the fetus through the mother's ingestion of even a small amount of alcohol also forces us to look at a troubling area of rights and responsibilities: the right of the child to come into the world with all the personal advantages that nature would like to provide; the right of the mother to do as she wishes to amuse or tranquilize herself.

A product and student of the Native American community, Dorris can show us how two cultures wrestle with such issues... how two versions of the "social contract" might try to cope with the human devastation inherent in a woman's consumption of drugs during her child-bearing years. His research led him to the realization that FAS and FAE have been surmised and counseled about in most of Western culture as far back as Ancient Greece.

Dorris' wife, a well-known author as well, gives an impassioned plea for the child in her foreword and expresses the hope that education might help eradicate this preventable tragedy, but she (Louise Erdrich) and husband Michael have understood how some activists could advocate jail terms for pregnant women who refuse to stop drinking during pregnancy.

I recommend *The Broken Cord* as a personal story, admirably told and exhaustively researched, that will add one more example to our human dilemma to keep rights and duties in balance in the course of our social covenanting. (R.K.)

"In anthropological theory there is a concept called "the superorganic" which is based upon the premise that members of a culture derive their worldview from the same pool of historically generated assumptions. To live harmoniously in society, we must construe a roughly similar future."

Michael Dorris in The Broken Cord

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