

[Mary Warnock \(1924–2019\)](#) [1]

By: LaTourelle, Jonathon J. Keywords: [Warnock Report](#) [2]

Baroness Mary Warnock of Weeke, a philosopher and crossbench member and Life Peer of the United Kingdom's House of Lords, participated in several national UK committees of inquiry that dealt with ethical and policy issues from animal experimentation, pollution, genetics, and euthanasia to educational policies for children with special needs. One of these was the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology, of which Warnock was the chair. The 1985 Warnock Report issued subsequent to this inquiry led to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 1990, passed in the British House of Commons, and to the creation of the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in 1991. Warnock has published a number of books on topics including existentialism, imagination, [reproductive rights](#) [3] and research ethics, euthanasia, the place of religion in politics, as well as several memoirs.

Warnock was born Helen Mary Wilson on 14 April 1924 in Winchester, England, to Ethel Mary Schuster and Archie Wilson. Warnock's father was, by the time of her birth, already dead seven months. Archie Wilson had been housemaster and teacher of Modern Languages at Winchester College in Winchester. In late 1923 he caught diphtheria during a school-wide outbreak and died, leaving behind five children and a newly pregnant wife. Warnock's eldest brother Malcom Wilson had what would later be diagnosed as a severe case of autism and lived most of his life in various medical and mental-health institutions. After Malcom came Jean, Duncan, Grizel, Stephana, and finally Helen Mary. The Wilson family also had a nanny, Emily Coleman, who stayed with them from 1920 until she died in in Mary's sister's house in 1976, at the age of ninety-four.

In 1937, Warnock attended St. Swithun's Anglican boarding school in Winchester. Warnock's said in her 2000*A Memoir* that St. Swithun's school was run by religious fanatics of whom all the schoolgirls were in awe. She reported that the school was closed because of what she describes as a panicky headmistress who was anxious about war and concerned over the school's vulnerability to attack. It was because of this that Warnock left St. Swithun's in December 1940 to finish her last year before university at Prior's Field, a small school in Godalming, UK.

In 1942 Warnock went to Lady Margeret Hall, Oxford University in Oxford, UK, where she spent the next five terms reading for Classical Honour Moderations and Greats, in which she received top marks. In the summer of 1948, she received a Gilchrist scholarship, which allowed her to extend her studies at Oxford another year, reading for the newly created Bachelor of Philosophy degree.

In the summer of 1949 Helen Mary Wilson married the philosopher Geoffrey James Warnock. Shortly after their marriage, Warnock was elected to a lectureship at St. Hugh's College in Oxford and her husband received a fellowship at Magdalen College, also in Oxford. She held her position as a fellow and tutor in philosophy until 1966. Geoffrey and Mary's first two children, Kitty and Felix, were born at their home in Summertown, North Oxford, UK. The Warnocks had three more children: two more girls and a boy. At the same time as they were starting a family, Warnock studied with the philosophers John Langshaw (J.L.) Austin and Philippa Foot, as well as many other Oxford philosophers of the time.

In 1966 Warnock applied and won the headship of Oxford High School in Oxford, UK. Over the next decade Warnock was involved in a variety of public works including holding a position as a member of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, from 1972 through 1983, and membership in the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, headquartered in London, UK, from 1979 to 1984.

In 1974 Warnock was solicited by Margaret Thatcher, then the UK Secretary of State for Education, to chair a committee of inquiry into the education of mentally and physically disabled children in the UK. Warnock wrote in her *A Memoir* that for her, the central question to be addressed by this inquiry was the function and value of public education in society. In her memoir, Warnock argued that society is socially and economically stratified into the uneducated and the educated. Accordingly, she said, education is a matter of social justice not just of social practice.

Warnock was committed to the view that no child was ineducable and that justice in a modern society demanded universal education from which no one ought to be automatically excluded. These principles are expressed in paragraph 1.4 of the final 1978 report issued by the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People. The authors of this report argued that the purpose of education is first for the betterment of the individual being educated and second for the betterment of the society that they will join after education is complete. For Warnock, addressing the needs of physically and cognitively disabled people was a special case of this general goal. The report issued by the committee argued that this view meant special needs children should be, as far as possible, integrated into the main stream of public education.

On the foundation that every child had fair access to education, Warnock and her committee pushed for the integration of special schools for the disabled with local educational authorities. The 1981 Education Act was largely the product of the Warnock Report on *Special Educational Needs* of 1978. Prior to the reforms of the Education Act of 1981, special education facilities in the UK had primarily been dedicated to special healthcare centers, with little or no education analogous to what other British children experienced. Warnock has said that she came to bitterly regret some of the provisions of the report, and has called for major revisions to be made. She has been especially vocal in her criticisms of current policies' vulnerability to, and unwitting encouragement of, abusive over-reporting by administrators of children with special needs.

By 1982 Warnock was teaching at various Oxford colleges and chaired the UK Home Office's committee on the use of animals in

scientific experimentation. Warnock later said of this time that her husband, Geoffrey James Warnock, had become vice-chancellor of Oxford the year before, and that she therefore had additional social functions as the wife of a vice-chancellor. Nevertheless, from 1982 through 1984 Warnock chaired the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology, headquartered in London, UK. In 1984 Her Majesty's Stationery Office published *The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology* widely called the Warnock Report. The first chapter of the report suggests that the birth of Louise Brown in July of 1978, the first child successfully conceived through [in vitro^{\[4\]} fertilization^{\[5\]}](#) technology, and the attendant social anxieties, galvanized the establishment of the Committee of Inquiry. The goal of the Committee of Inquiry was to make recommendations for new policies that would regulate the rapidly changing world of (in)fertility medicine, which by then included [artificial insemination^{\[6\]}](#), surrogacy, [in vitro^{\[4\]} fertilization^{\[5\]}](#), a process by which an [egg^{\[7\]}](#) is fertilized outside the body of the mother, [egg donation^{\[8\]}](#), [embryo donation^{\[9\]}](#), and the professional services and medical technologies they entailed.

In the report, the Committee addressed medical experimentation on embryos and concluded that it was permissible to perform many medical and scientific experiments on a developing embryo within the first fourteen days of [gestation^{\[10\]}](#), after which time experimentation should be illegal. The Committee argued that no [central nervous system^{\[11\]}](#) was present within the first fourteen days of development and so the embryo would be unable to feel anything.

Chapter twelve of the 1984 Warnock Report, "Possible Future Developments in Research," specifically addressed limitations on acceptable experimental programs as well as other more theoretical ethical issues to do with [embryology^{\[12\]}](#). This chapter also provided guidelines for the limited use of trans-species [fertilization^{\[5\]}](#), the limited use of human embryos for drug testing, a suggested criminal prohibition against implanting human embryos in other species, as well as briefly discussing [nucleus^{\[13\]}](#) substitution, or [cloning^{\[14\]}](#), among other foreseeable implications of the underlying biology. The Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority, headquartered in London, UK, said that the Warnock Report of 1984 was the foundation upon which the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 1990 was built.

In 1984 the British government named Warnock Dame Commander and a year later, she was named Baroness Warnock of Weeke. In 1985 Warnock published a full report with an introduction expanding on the philosophical ideas that guided the report called *A Question of Life*. From 1984 through 1989 Warnock chaired a Home Office Committee on animal experimentation. And in January of 1985 she became Mistress of Girton College at the University of Cambridge, in Cambridge, UK, a post from which she retired in 1991. In 1995, her husband Geoffrey James Warnock died of a degenerative lung disease.

Warnock remained active in the House of Lords into the twenty-first century. From 1998 through 2001 she was on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Medical Ethic Board and from 1998, until at least 2014, she was a part of the Advisory Panel on Spoliation. Warnock published a book about euthanasia in her 2008 *Easeful Death: Is There a Case for Assisted Dying?* and about religion and politics in her 2011 *Dishonest to God: On Keeping Religion out of Politics* Warnock is credited with shepherding the passage of the world's first comprehensive legislation that regulated the use of human embryos.

Warnock died on 20 March, 2019 in Savernake, UK.

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