the use and the perpetuation of use of ineffective drugs and procedures.

The premise that 'nothing should undermine the basic principle that first class health care should be available free of charge and provided at the tax payer's expense for all those genuinely in need' is emphasised, but present behaviour seems to be taking this goal further and further away. Throughout the world and under all kinds of systems, some degree of rationing of health services exists, whether it be overtly by depth of purse or discreetly by availability.

This paperback is well written and the standard of illustrations and tabular information is extremely high, as we have now come to expect from OHE publications. It does not outline all options for resolving the dilemma. In particular, the alternatives to expenditure on health service are not discussed, for example the returns with regard to the nation's health would perhaps be greater if housing standards were drastically improved. Anyone seeking a fresh approach to the dilemma will not find one here, but the author did declare that he simply intended to open the debate.

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The Dilemma of Abortion

Edwin Kenyon, 283 pages, London
£6.50, Faber and Faber Limited, 1986.

Those of us concerned with seeing patients about having an abortion may well agree with Dr Kenyon's theme that the laws involved greatly need tidying up, but we all probably feel apprehensive about the outcome of any attempt at new legislation. The curious mixture of politics, moral philosophy and clinical considerations, dominated for some by powerful religious forces, may so affect the legislative process at any of several stages that we could be landed with a legal framework in which the care we feel our patients need would be very difficult to provide. Those who remember the time before David Steel's Abortion Act of 1967 became law will not easily forget the shady stratagems to which patients and their doctors had to resort in order that abortions could be done cleanly and properly. We also remember, as Dr Kenyon indicates, the

three or four cases of septic abortion admitted each night to an average city gynaecological unit, some going on to the renal unit and some to the post-mortem room.

Legal change is a dilemma, motives for which vary and there are so many areas of dilemma laid out in this well-produced and easily read account. One of the problems for an author is to define his profile of attitudes towards the various aspects of abortion because so much of the work is incapable of objective observation or description. Religious hard-liners would dispute the simplest fact produced by a liberal moderate. Dr Kenyon's position emerges as one who cares more for individuals than for generalisations. He does not inevitably recommend that an abortion be carried out whenever requested, but is more concerned with a policy of least harm. Therein lies the dilemma of a woman's free choice. It seems certain that she should have choice of adviser but perhaps the adviser – if his value to the patient is to be real – must equally be free to advise against the treatment. Careful weighing of the probabilities might lead to the opinion that worse harm would follow an abortion than from continuing with the pregnancy.

Dr Kenyon gives a very clear view of why abortion services should be efficient and effectively available to all potential users and he points out the unfair biases within the National Health Service (NHS) against women, particularly geographically. There are also, shamefully, biases in the NHS against safe completion of the procedure. Health service managers are frequently too preoccupied with other issues, or too cynical, to see that a good service is provided, although Cochrane demonstrated years ago the high cost-effectiveness of an abortion service.

The Dilemma of Abortion is admirably clear and full of interest for every reader, not merely for professionals. The present writer sees the book as free from prejudice, but that may just be one man's meat. A particularly instructive section describes the history of attitudes to abortion in various major religions: it may be a surprise to some that the Catholic ban may only have started in 1869. It seems amazing that a form of Christianity can contribute to the massive evil of the 'unofficial' abortions in South America at the present time by continuing to outlaw safe abortion policies in medical care.

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Bioethics and Belief

John Mahoney, 127 pages, London,
£3.95, Sheed and Ward, 1984.

The burgeoning literature on medical ethics tends to be dominated by secular philosophers like Jonathan Glover and Peter Singer. Roman Catholic theologians have tended to operate in their own, quite different, moral world, at least in Britain. This book by a leading Jesuit moral theologian goes some way to redress the balance. It originated as a set of lectures at the Catholic chaplaincy at Glasgow University; but the fact that it is primarily addressed to a Roman Catholic audience in no way diminishes its interest. As Professor Mahoney points out, Catholic moral teaching is almost entirely based on a natural law tradition – that is, on the consideration by human reason of the structures of nature, and the moral guidelines they suggest. His concern is to probe some of the structures, as they are illuminated by recent medical advances, and to develop the Catholic tradition of moral thought in this new light.

The main chapter of the book is devoted to a consideration of the beginning of human life. He outlines the traditional Catholic teaching on ensoulment, and at first seems to accept the view that the human soul is a 'simple spiritual substance', endowed with innate capacities, which must have a discrete beginning, not a gradual genesis. It is consequently of great importance to say just when this beginning is, if the human being is to have full rights to life from that moment. His own suggestion, following important elements of the tradition, is that the soul can be said to originate only when there is some degree of development in physical nature which allows it to exist. That is, he thinks, at the beginning of cell-differentiation, perhaps at about 14 days (though he does not give a precise number). The arguments which lead him to this conclusion are, partly, the great wastage of embryos at early stages, but mainly the possibility of twinning or splitting at an early stage of embryogenesis. But he is also influenced by Rahner (and perhaps Teilhard) to propose the view that personal being 'wells up' from matter by a developmental process, 'without invoking additional and almost miraculous intervention on the part of God', page 81. It seems to follow that very early abortion and experimentation on embryos for

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morally good ends is not ruled out. The official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is that such things can never be justified; though Mahoney points out that there is also an official agnosticism about when ensoulment takes place. He argues that it seems most likely that it does so after conception; and that it is not morally wrong to act on what seems the rationally most likely option. I am not sure that the developmental view and the view that the soul has a discrete beginning, as a spiritual substance, are really reconcilable. That does seem to involve a form of dualism which the language of consciousness welling up from complex material organisation does not entail. But the discussion itself is of great interest.

There are also chapters on human fertility control, euthanasia, medical research and the importance of a continuing dialogue between theology and medicine. Despite Pope Pius XII's condemnation of artificial insemination, in 1951, Professor Mahoney argues that both Artificial Insemination by Husband (AIH) and *in vitro* fertilisation are acceptable. The Pope apparently held that human intercourse and procreation are essentially bound together. But Mahoney suggests that this is mere conservatism, which neglects the interpersonal context of sexual activity

and refuses the challenge of responsible stewardship of creation. He himself argues, however, that children should only be procreated within an 'exclusive covenant relationship' of marriage, which rules out Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID). That restriction seems to me to forget the emphasis on the personal factors and retract to a biological viewpoint – since the anonymous donor simply contributes genes to facilitate procreation, and in no way interferes with the personal relationship of marriage. Mahoney rejects the argument that AID may be harmful to the growing child later on, on the ground that there is insufficient experimental data to show this. However, he here lights upon a major difficulty of consequentialist ethical views – namely, that in order to prove that X is really harmful one has to do it. It seems unduly paradoxical to say that one must cause harm to show that it should be avoided. Perhaps what that shows is that one needs some independent criterion of 'harm', before one waits to see whether people like the consequences of their actions. Perhaps that is indeed Professor Mahoney's argument. But if so, we stand in need of a much fuller specification of just what human good and harm is than he provides.

He defends the distinction between

'allowing to die' and 'killing'; but he does not meet the criticisms of Glover or Singer head on. In general, the treatment of handicapped neonates requires much more extended treatment; and I doubt whether the full force of the medical dilemmas have been felt here as strongly as they were in the case of contraception, which Mahoney fails to condemn in all cases. But of course part of the interest of the book lies in its expression of what Roman Catholic moral theologians take to be of most engaging interest. Overall, it is a clear and exemplary treatment of its subject matter, and well deserves a place among the standard ethical texts on medical matters. It should be said that, since its publication, the book had its *'imprimatur'* from the Roman Catholic Church withdrawn – and consequently its sales vastly increased. It cannot therefore be taken as an authoritative expression of Roman Catholic attitudes. But if it is critical of its own tradition, the book still stands firmly within that tradition of taking the given structures of the natural order seriously, as a guide and limit to human action. Such an unfashionable view needed a sensitive and able exposition. That it now has.

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