nightmare, as the thin edge of the wedge, as in the Nazi experience, as a threat to the trust between patients and doctors and as evidenced by the moral dilemma of doctors themselves.

The ethical dimensions of mercy-killing are profound and the authors rightly label the still almost taboo subject 'one of the last serious moral issues for modern society to decide on'. It is certainly an idea viewed with abhorrence by many, but the euthanasia movement has grown rapidly in the USA where 40 States now have 'living will' legislation which effectively authorises the maker's family and doctors not to take 'extraordinary' measures to prolong life when death seems inevitable and the illness incurable. In Britain, the pro-euthanasia movement has grown steadily under the auspices of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society but it is the Netherlands which has taken the most radical steps in providing a legal framework with strict guidelines for doctors who have to treat patients who have asked for life-preserving treatment to be withheld at a certain point. The Dutch legislation goes further even than withholding treatment. There, a physician who meets strict criteria, can give a lethal injection to a dying person who has requested death and the physician will not be punished.

It seems unlikely that the British medical profession or the public are yet ready to go that far but this book is a valuable contribution to the debate.

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A Time to be Born, a Time to Die

Rasa Gustaitis and Ernle W D Young,
267 pages, USA, \$18.95, Addison-
Wesley, 1986

This book was written by two non-medical authors, one of whom, Gustaitis, is a professional journalist and the other a chaplain and senior lecturer in medical ethics in the Stanford University medical school. They were given the free run of the neonatal, intensive-care nursery at Stanford University and had detailed frequent discussions with the medical and nursing staff, as well as with the parents of very small babies. They lived on the premises and absorbed the whole atmosphere of the problems created by, and sometimes solved by neonatal intensive care.

This book should be compulsory reading for all those engaged in, or considering a career in, neonatal medicine. It is well written and full of understanding and feeling for the babies who can express no opinion, for their parents who do not have a much bigger say in the matter and for the doctors who have to make life-and-death decisions in an atmosphere of American legislation which may compel them to carry out intensive treatment against their consciences and against the interests of the babies.

What they describe with immense sympathy and understanding is the absolute horror of American medicine, which I am afraid is already creeping into our own practice.

They have admiration for the magnificent technology which is increasing almost every day but which runs far ahead of the consideration of what its application means to so many. It may be best to quote verbatim a paragraph which will give the reader a good impression of the substance and tone of the whole book:

'However, hand in hand with this progress run its side-effects, threatening to trip it and send it crashing into a nightmarish domain where, as in George Orwell's 1984, things become the opposite of what they were intended to be. In the intensive care nursery, where the dramas of neonatology unfold, equipment designed to be therapeutic can turn into machinery for torture. Saving life can mean prolonged dying. Babies are "saved" only to be confined to institutions as total care patients, while their families are destroyed by the "rescue". The burden of choice is as great as its potential.'

The book should be on the shelves in every neonatal intensive-care unit and should be frequently read and not just catalogued.

May we be spared the horrors of intensive neonatal care inflicted on American babies!

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Brave New People

D G Davies, 221 pages, Leicester,
£4.95, Inter-Varsity Press, 1984

This book, written by a professor of anatomy who is a devout Christian, has

two main aims. One is to survey the main controversial problem areas in medical ethics around the time of the commencement of life: abortion; artificial insemination; ethics of embryo research and experimentation; prenatal diagnosis; genetic engineering; cloning, and *in vitro* fertilisation. The book provides a useful survey of the moral problems in these areas, ostensibly from a Christian viewpoint. It is an area which receives little attention in the medical-student curriculum although we will soon be in the position of having to make immediate decisions on such dilemmas, whether as physicians or as parents. I thus found this book of great benefit since it opened my eyes to such controversies and provided me with an information base on which to formulate my own opinions.

The book's second aim is to argue for a mechanism whereby the consensus of society on these issues can be obtained and applied. In order that an appropriate decision may be reached Gareth Davies hopes 'that even those who disagree with my stance on various points will look beyond such disagreement to the underlying principles'. This makes an important point: there is a need for patients, and for society at large, to become more involved in medical decision-making, particularly, perhaps, with regard to general principles. There is no escape from the ramifications of biomedical technology and the many issues raised in the book should provoke the reader into reflecting on his or her own ethics and practices. Furthermore the point is made that many people prefer their doctors to make choices for them in areas such as abortion and prenatal screening. I found this rather disconcerting in its implication that doctors have some particular divine right to preside over human life and that they will always arrive at the 'right' answer.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this fascinating book, which deals with issues that are less than comfortable and conveys some of the dilemmas and quandaries facing personnel involved in making decisions about human life around the time of its inception. The text was refreshingly free from the pretentious jargon which sometimes disfigures studies of this sort. The only disappointment is that the book was not able to deal with developments in medical ethics over the past couple of years since it was published in 1984. In particular in the field of research on embryos a discussion of the Warnock committee report would have been

useful. That one feels that this is a real shortcoming of the book reflects the rapid pace of progress in this field and the consequent urgent need for up-to-date discussion of the ethical issues involved.

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Law on Poisons, Medicines and Related Substances

P F C Bayliss, 104 pages, London, Studies in Law and Health Service Management, Ravenswood Publications, 2nd ed, 1986

In 1851, the legislature took its first small step in the control of dangerous substances, many of which were then freely available to the public either as constituents in commercially-sold cleansing agents or for pest control, or in themselves as tonics sold for human consumption. The Arsenic Act restricted the use of poison for criminal purposes, an abuse which in the light of recent developments in the illegal use of drugs and medicines generally, has now fallen into insignificance.

The present law on the subject distinguishes between drugs, poisons and medicines, the lines between the different categories being drawn by statutory definition, and not by causal distinctions reached by a layman's common-sense approach. The result has been, for example, that some substances formerly known as poisons have now been absorbed into one or another of the other two categories, with particular regulations applying to the statutory definitions.

The modern law is to be found basically in three statutes passed between the years 1968 and 1972 – the Medicines Act 1968, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the Poisons Act 1972. As in most enabling legislation, the detailed control of the matters affected lies in the hands of the minister concerned, who issues his directives in the form of statutory instruments which have the force of law, and are subject to the ultimate veto of parliament should they overstep the mark. Finally, the reports of important decisions reached in the High Court provide the precedent on matters not fully defined in the statutes, these decisions being binding (for example, the case of *R V Watts* 1984, which is referred to in Dr Bayliss's book).

One of the most valuable features of the book is the lists of statutes, statutory

instruments and cases provided for those who wish to refer to original sources, although adequate summaries may be found in the text. Since the legislation contains the inevitably prosaic minutiae of the administration of dangerous substances, these summaries make hard reading, but this is a book primarily for reference and, as such, is comprehensively done. The people for whom the book is written, namely, anyone working in the health service as a doctor, dentist, pharmacist, midwife or administrator (not forgetting students) cannot be reasonably expected to absorb it all, although it is unfortunately true that a false step taken along the line between factory and patient may incur a penal sanction. It is for those responsible for the administration involving the final destination of a potentially dangerous substance to provide the proper guidance.

For those whom it may concern, then, Dr Bayliss's study explains the nature and purpose of the legislation and summarises the gist of its content. Although much of this is of a pedestrian nature, the writer does not fail to give a degree of prominence to what he considers (rightly) to be the ultimate purpose of the legislation, and he is particularly concerned with the way in which it aims to protect innocent people suffering, or likely to suffer, from the results of any perverted use of the substance in question, for example from the illegal administration of an insufficiently tested drug, or from the illegal use of a drug in order to assist a criminal act such as a rape or an unauthorised abortion.

A proper place is given in the book to the problem of drug addiction, and it appears to the reviewer slightly odd that the word 'drug' does not appear in the title.

The book contains little of direct interest to the ethicist since this was not its purpose, rather it is a clear statement of the law as it stood in 1986.

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Cross-currents: Interactions between Science and Faith

Colin A Russell, 272 pages, Leicester, £9.95, Inter-Varsity Press, 1985

The author is Professor of the History of

Science and Technology at the Open University, where he has been involved in the production of three courses related to the theme of this book, which have been taken by several thousand students. So it is not surprising that it is strong on history. Anyone not well acquainted with the theme will profit both from the text and the interesting bibliography. In particular one will learn a good deal of the relation of the scientific achievements to the religious beliefs of great figures of the past from Boyle and Newton to Einstein and Rutherford. Most attention is given to physics. Russell is well aware of the problems of compression, but even so the chapters covering the twentieth century are highly concentrated. After a brief look at Lorenz, Desmond Morris, E O Wilson and Lynn White (the historian) the book rather peters out with a chapter on Faraday.

A mythology has developed on the historical relations between natural science and Christian theology to the effect that it has been a tale of continual warfare between the two, resulting in a series of unsuccessful rearguard actions by theology. Russell has no difficulty in showing that in fact there were varying reactions from both sides. He makes the interesting suggestion that much of the opposition to Darwinism from both scientists and Christian leaders was because it was perceived to be subversive of the social order, a sociological insight which there is no space to document or follow up.

Russell writes eirenicly, but he writes from a type of evangelical theological point of view which requires comment. He wants to vindicate the importance of 'Biblical principles' for the prosecution of natural science, and thus to stress the importance of the Reformation, and to destroy the negative image often attached to Puritanism. (In my view this is because it is treated as too monolithic a phenomenon.) Russell is not a Fundamentalist, as that term is usually understood, the chapter on geology and the Flood makes that clear but, unless one accepts a conservative evangelical theological position, the philosophy and theology underlying the book is not satisfactory. It takes no account of the factors of cultural relativity in human thought as a fundamental issue with which modern theology has had to reckon. The Bible is treated as if it speaks in a uniform way. No account is taken of different theologies which have been held at different times related to the same Biblical data. It is not realised that repeating the same Biblical and