the place of the Christian family in a Christian community.

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Health: The Foundations for Achievement

David Seedhouse, 104 pages,
Chichester, £5.95, John Wiley & Sons,
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Most ethical problems in medicine arise as a result of new developments designed to reduce morbidity and mortality and increase health. But what exactly is meant by the term 'health'? The author of this text is a professional philosopher who addresses this question in depth. A dictionary definition is certainly not sufficient. Nor is the often quoted definition of health, as being the absence of disease, helpful, since it merely emphasises only one aspect of the problem – namely the medical. Confusion arises because the term is ambiguous and may have different meanings for different people – the so-called 'Idols of the Market Place' of Francis Bacon.

The difficulties are exemplified in seven brief case histories; a young man who suffers from delusions which affect his work, a middle-aged married man whose only leisure activity is watching TV, a young woman who is now paraplegic following a car accident, a mother with cancer of the breast, an unemployed couple, a West-Indian youth on probation, and a successful businessman who drinks and smokes too much. The health status of each of these individuals is considered from the point of view of a doctor, a social scientist, an 'idealist', and a humanist. It soon becomes clear that each has different ideas as to who is healthy and who is not.

The author then proceeds to discuss various theories of health, including the idea of 'human potential', and concludes that '... all theories of health and all approaches designed to increase health are intended to advise against, to prevent the creation of, or to remove, *obstacles to the achievement of human potential* (my italics). These obstacles may be biological, environmental, societal, familial or personal'.

However, the author is quick to emphasise that the individual's potential should be realistic given his age and situation. Thus health is considered as 'the foundations for achievement' in biological, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, creative and recreational terms. Viewed in this broader context then none of the seven cases might be considered really healthy.

Finally, the author argues that this concept of health broadens the scope of health education from merely emphasising disease *prevention* to actually *creating* health through getting individuals to recognise their potentials for achievement. An interesting and provocative book which is well worth reading.

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Bioethics and Belief: Religion and Medicine in Dialogue

John Mahoney, 127 pages, London,
£3.95, Sheed and Ward, 1986

This is a reprint of a book first published in 1984. Then it had the *Imprimatur* of the Archdiocese of Westminster. Subsequently there were protests in some Roman Catholic circles that the book was not in conformity on certain aspects of medical ethics with that Church's teaching, and that some conclusions advanced in it were at variance with that teaching and therefore erroneous.

This is particularly the case with respect to the moral status to be recognised in the early embryo of the human species. In June 1986 the *Imprimatur* was withdrawn and the book now appears without it. Later in that year Mahoney, one of the most distinguished moral theologians in Britain, succeeded to the Chair of Moral and Social Theology in King's College, London. In the first instance therefore, this book must be of great interest to Roman Catholics. But it has a much wider relevance. Mahoney's clear and concise moral reasoning on some of the most important current issues in medical ethics basically depends on the recognition of an element of mystery in life, especially human life, which leads to a certain reverence in thought and action in relation to it. He himself relates it to Christian belief, but it can

be widely shared by those of other faiths and philosophies, and one hopes it would be a brash person who did not share it. Mahoney works out its implications almost entirely in relation to recent Roman Catholic documents, but it is easy to place them in a wider context. The sting for the Roman Catholic Church, which is liable to overcall the authority and fixity of what is not strictly claimed to be infallible teaching, comes when Mahoney shows that in some cases different conclusions are possible from the same premises, and that in some others there are inconsistencies behind the reasoning of official documents. He is the more persuasive because he handles the documents with scrupulous care and respect. Presumably that is why the book was at first given the *Imprimatur*.

In questions of human fertility and control he shows that procreation is a complex phenomenon and not merely a biological one, and that this allows for the legitimacy in certain circumstances of new human powers of control of fertility. He considers issues in death and dying, and in medical research and experiments on human subjects. The chapter on the beginning of life includes the most detailed of the author's discussions on the nature of the human person, and it is the one place where he does seem to get entangled in a legacy of Aristotelian-Roman Catholic teaching. This teaching concerns the concept of the soul as a simple, spiritual substance created by God in an act of direct and immediate creation. Mahoney at first seems to go along with this to a surprising extent, but he concludes that 'the traditional Christian philosophical and theological doctrine of the human soul is in a thoroughly unsatisfactory state, particularly in the light of embryological studies' (p100). These are wise words, but the thought is not new. It is a pity that the Vatican authorities do not take them to heart.

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In Search of the Modern Hippocrates

Roger J Bulger, editor, 256 pages,
Iowa, \$27.50, University of Iowa Press,
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According to the editor, this collection of 17 essays was compiled in the belief that the Hippocratic oath needed

updating, and that the way to do this was for distinguished doctors to distil their accumulated wisdom in personal reflections on their own experience of learning, doctoring and teaching. Dr Bulger also expresses a wish to provide a written analogue of various inspirational encounters in his own history. Unfortunately even those who possess wisdom, or can inspire by personal example, cannot necessarily transmit that wisdom or inspiration in writing; it is all too easy to lapse instead into idiosyncrasy and platitude.

Dr Bulger has in fact put together a very heterogeneous set of articles, reflecting his conviction that something is wrong with US medicine, and that the cure is a reform of US medical ethics, starting with the motivation of individual practitioners, and an expansion of the concept of scientific medicine into more holistic healing. Apart from reflecting the editor's interests, the collection has little coherence. It encompasses many different styles or genres, for instance: personal musings on the ethics of medicine; the application of psychiatric theory to ethics; sociological description of healing in different cultures; accounts of key personal experiences within and outside medicine; historical studies of Hippocrates and the Hippocratic corpus; reflections on the ethics of truth-telling in medicine, and an embarrassing fictional dialogue between Hippocrates and a revered colleague of the editor, in which Dr Bulger puts his own re-writing of the Hippocratic oath into the mouth of Hippocrates himself.

In Britain at any rate, few could find much to object to in Dr Bulger's new oath; its interest lies in why it is felt to be necessary and pertinent in the USA now. But what is conspicuously lacking in most of the essays – particularly in the editor's own (seven) contributions – is any very clear or powerful analysis, or even description, of exactly what is felt to be wrong with US medicine, let alone evidence for the analysis or careful argument for the proposed cures. Exceptions to this are the articles by Drs Relman and Reiser, which do at least offer a coherent story and an intelligible link between the perceived ills (excessive commercialism, impersonality and fragmentation of care into multiple medical and technological specialisms) and the proposed remedies (greater social responsibility in and tighter control by the medical profession as a body, and greater understanding of the uses and effects of

new technologies on care). But the collection contains virtually no sustained ethical argument; we are offered instead deeply felt but unexciting personal convictions (such as, for instance, the belief that doctors should put patients' interests first, listen to them, talk to them, tell them the truth, and be motivated by an ideal of service). Transmitting wisdom requires something more than this, even though the authors may well have good store of wisdom between them. However, perhaps the reader can distil his or her own from the good thoughts and interesting ideas that do from time to time crop up. It is moreover interesting for a British reader to find that just when private medicine is being encouraged to expand in the UK and market economics and entrepreneurial verve are extolled as the answer to all social ills, US doctors are lamenting the effects of just these factors on their own system of delivering medical care, and are calling for greater social responsibility, collective thinking, and disinterested service in the medical professions.

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Shared concern

Video; Society of Parents Helping in Education, 1987. Available for sale for £45 from King's Fund Centre, 126 Albert Street, London NW1 7NF and for hire from CFL Vision, Chalfont Grove, Gerrards Cross, SL9 8TN (02407 4433) ref UK 3965, for £10.50. Cost includes P & P, VAT and booklets.

Shared concern (subtitled *Breaking the news to parents that their newborn child has a disability*), is a video made for medical and health workers and students by SOPHIE – Society Of Parents Helping In Education. SOPHIE originates from a group of parents with children with varying disabilities. Most members of the group were dissatisfied with many of the services and wanted to help to improve them. They regarded 'breaking the news as the first crucial step undertaken, and the one which had the most lasting effect on our lives, and on those of our children'. Concerned that medical students had little training in this area, they made the video.

The strength of the video is the restrained and careful way in which it portrays and discusses many aspects of breaking sad news to parents. There is a

fine balance of sympathy and respect; sadness does not become cloying and a rather inept doctor is shown as uncertain rather than indifferent. Scenes of one family learning that their baby has Down's syndrome, are interspersed with comments from doctors and from a well selected range of families. The video is clearly based on the experiences, both rewarding and bitter, of parents and doctors.

Anyone looking for the perfectly correct method of breaking sad news will be disappointed and possibly irritated by the sequence of comments. There is a constant contradiction. One parent asks for hope, another for realism. A mother's criticism of an unnecessarily gloomy prognosis is followed by another family slowly coming to terms with terribly severe limitations: 'I'm learning things now, twenty years on, that I should have known from day one,' said the father. Within this simply made film there is a wealth of detail to provoke discussion and to encourage the viewer towards an ethical understanding of the problems of breaking such news. And part of the problem is that learned techniques are only of limited help. The most important element is the quality of the person giving the news and the care with which he or she responds to the family and continues to offer support and to teach acceptance. This close contact with families can be extremely wearing but, as one mother said, 'If you can't relate to the patients because it's going to hurt you, then you're in the wrong job'.

A copy of the handbook is meant to be given to every viewer. It is a useful complement to the 27-minute video, being a permanent record full of definite and practical information, sources of help and further discussion points. As a result of SOPHIE's work, many more parents should be able to say with one mother in the film: 'I can't think of anything more the hospital could have done to make it easier'.

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The Foetus as Transplant Donor: Scientific, Social and Ethical Perspectives

Peter McCullagh, 215 pages, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, £25, 1987