technique has become clinical practice, ethical discussions belatedly commence and that is too late. This is what happened in Sweden when prenatal diagnosis was introduced.

The author concludes by saying that "it must be considered to be a main core of the work-ethics of any scientific or technological specialty that specialists have a strong responsibility to lay ground for, initiate and participate in such discussions".

My conclusion is that the author has written an important work which describes and analyses the implicit moral values of medical specialists in Sweden during the introduction of prenatal diagnosis. I believe his findings can be generalised to other countries and that they show the importance of discussing ethical issues at an early stage in the introduction of a new technique or technology.

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Christian Virtues in Medical Practice

Edmund D Pellegrino and David C Thomasina, Washington DC, Georgetown University Press, 1996, 164+xii pages, £21.75, \$27.95.

The authors say of this book that it "attempts to define the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity and to show how they modify the practice of medicine and the healing professions and the ethical principles of benevolence, autonomy and justice". These, together with non-maleficence (which the authors regard as too minimal to warrant consideration) have been much discussed in recent years in medical ethics, notably in what has become a standard book, *Principles of Bioethics* by Beauchamp and Childress. The authors of *Christian Virtues in Medical Practice* are two American Roman Catholics: Pellegrino is a well-known medical specialist and ethicist, and Thomasina a philosopher with clinical interests. This is the latest of a series of collaborations by them. They say that medical ethics has expanded more rapidly in the last 20 years than in the whole of the previous 2,500 years, and also that the golden age of specific medicine has just begun.

In this dynamic situation the practice of medicine is carried on in the "West" in plural societies, hence the effort to arrive at some agreed basic principles. The authors are convinced that the many Christians involved in the practice of medicine must be engaged in serious ethical discussion with those of other faiths and philosophies engaged in medical practice. They must show courtesy and respect for them; dogmatism and proselytising with respect to colleagues or patients must be ruled out, for it does not respect them as persons. At the same time the preoccupation of the authors is with what Christianity can contribute to ethical issues in medical practice. What can it add to the natural virtues of benevolence, autonomy and justice and the concomitant truth-telling, promise-keeping and confidentiality which follow from them? How can faith, hope and charity inform the ethical discernment of Christians? The relation is bound to be subtle. However, charity can rule out things which are not subtle; rudeness, inaccountability, abruptness, refusal to treat for economic reasons, discrimination because of social class or ethnicity, medical practice regarded as a business, or as an exercise in entrepreneurship, applied biology, politics, or social convenience. These and other radical remarks would appear to call into question much public policy in the USA (and, of course, the UK), but the authors do not directly address these, confining their few remarks to Christian hospitals.

In the middle chapters of the book they write cogently on the greater depth which the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity add to the natural virtues of benevolence, autonomy and justice. They make full allowance for the fact that these virtues can be expressed by non-believers and that believers by no means always embody them, whilst maintaining their radicality and their call to a perfection which cannot be fully achieved but which nevertheless challenges and inspires. The book is not for the most part concerned with the substance of ethical decisions, but with the manner of arriving at them. The aim of the moral life is indeed to make the right decisions, but also to be a person of discernment and right motivation, for moral judgment is an art. This book is mostly concerned with the latter, with an ethic of virtue, with a Christian moral philosophy looking

back in particular to St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. An ethic of virtue can never be neglected, and there has been considerable recent discussion of it both in moral philosophy and moral theology; and the latter must not ignore the former, as this book recognises. However, its discussion of moral philosophy will be too condensed for those unfamiliar with it. The basis of the book is the Christian understanding of the dignity of the person, of which the writings of Pope John Paul II are surprisingly taken as the key example, rather than some notable twentieth-century personalist philosophers and theologians.

This brings me to a weakness in the book. It accepts without discussion the teaching of the Roman Catholic *magisterium*. It is one thing to accept it, but another not to deal with criticisms made of it by other Christians and by many Roman Catholic moral theologians. The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) is taken for granted. An absolute position is assumed on abortion, euthanasia and several other issues regarded as intrinsically evil acts, a conception which itself requires examination. No notice is taken of the position of Christians who would be grateful for large parts of the book but who disagree with these absolute positions. Is it not unwise to assume that once the *magisterium* has spoken critical moral reason is suspended? Reception by the faithful must in the long run be decisive with respect to the teaching of the church, as the example of *Humanae Vitae* on contraception has shown.

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The Moral Maze of Practice: a Stimulus for Reflection and Discussion

N Kohner, London, King's Fund Publishing, 1996, 92 pages, £8.

This concise, affordable text, accurately reflects its title. Amongst its intended readership of health care professionals it will be of immense value to clinically based nurses,

degree and diploma nurse students and medical students. The majority of professional nurses will easily relate to the all too common stories highlighting a variety of ethical dilemmas which are introduced in the text. These, the reader will find, are of equal relevance to all health care professionals in the light of current health care practices.

The main tool used to engage the reader incorporates a process of clinically focused reflection and discussion. The primary intended outcomes of these exercises appear to be to develop and focus the understanding and awareness of professional nurses regarding the everyday ethical issues and dilemmas that arise from clinical nursing practice. Kohner manages this using a non-confrontational approach which should appeal to many readers.

Clinical stories are presented, followed by suggested discussion points. These allow the participants to explore issues arising from the story and enable them to reflect on the ethical dilemmas which are the key to each story. Nurses are likely to find themselves stimulated by the debate and discussion originating from these everyday nursing situations.

The stories are centred around common key areas of professional nursing practice:

- Accepting and respecting the individuality and autonomy of the patient or client
- The nurse-family relationship
- The role and responsibilities of the nurse.

Each of these key areas comprises a selection of stories that cover a variety of clinically based scenarios in the community and in hospitals, encompassing incidents from across the spectrum of critical, acute and long term care of patients and their families. The dilemmas for nurses in similar clinical situations, together with the relevant ethics can be identified

from the discussion that ensues.

Many nurses will relate their discussions to their personal practice, while being able at the same time to acknowledge the relevance of their discussion to differing areas of clinical practice, recognising that the principles involved cross the inter-professional boundaries and disciplines.

The text does not provide a theoretical background to ethical principles and issues that arise from the theory. This could be a potential weakness for readers with little or no ethical background, but this does not detract from the original intention of being a catalyst for promoting reflection and discussion and should not put off potential readers.

Short commentaries complete each section. This enables the recognition of common strands between each area, together with the underpinning ethical dilemmas raised by the stories. These commentaries will be extremely helpful to those who lack a background in ethics, and enable the reader to identify simple ethical principles (while simultaneously providing directions for limited further reading for captivated participants). This section does a great deal to rectify the main weakness of the book previously identified.

The focus of this self-directed approach is to encourage professional nurses to be increasingly aware of, and to utilise, ethical principles in underpinning and developing their personal and professional practice. To this end the penultimate section suggests key factors, derived from the stories, which are recognised by the author as being essential in the development of an ethically based practice.

The final section of this book encourages readers to develop their awareness further. Useful suggestions on how to develop small discussion groups to continue the process of reflection are provided, together with selected exercises. The latter are primarily focused on increasing

self-awareness regarding personal and professional values and roles while simultaneously developing communication skills.

This book is highly readable. I can imagine nurses using it as a focus for clinically based discussion at ward and unit level as well as on an individual basis. The issues arising from the stories will reflect many clinical situations experienced by nurses in their everyday clinical practice. This should assist in the identification of the appropriate ethical dilemmas arising from given situations, while providing a stimulus for further debate. This enables the reader to develop personal awareness regarding the ethical underpinning of professional practice and will encourage health care professionals to continue to develop their personal and professional practice based on appropriate ethical principles.

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