a need for serious ethical discussions, and for ethicists on commissions of this kind and in a public-policy context. This report had two aims, one explicit and one implicit: the first was to investigate how ethical issues were treated in a government commission and the second was to point out the importance of letting ethicists take part in public-policy contexts as experts. The case this report investigated showed that the ethicists' work was not very helpful, but still the authors conclude that there is a need for ethicists in a public-policy context and they also present four possible tasks for ethicists.

Politicians often talk today about ethics, but it is sometimes difficult to understand what they really mean. Therefore it is important to investigate whether this talk is serious or if it is merely talk. One way of doing this is to do what is done in this report and examine a public-policy paper on how ethics is treated. The authors found a great discrepancy between the opinion of the government representatives and the result of the philosophical investigation of the white paper. That is an important finding which hopefully may result in a better understanding, amongst politicians and officials, of what ethics really is about and what philosophical investigation can contribute.

JAN ARLEBRINK

*Faculty of Medicine and the Department
of Theology and Religious Studies,
Lund University,
Sweden*

Regulating Medical Work: Formal and Informal Controls

Judith Allsop and Linda Mulcahy,
Buckingham, Open University Press,
1996, 230 pages, £45 hc,
£16.99 sc.

In recent years, the right of the medical profession to regulate itself has been challenged both by commentators, and by changes in the context in which doctors work, for instance, the increased focus on the resource implications of clinical decision-making brought about by the National Health Service (NHS) reforms of 1990. *Regulating Medical Work* seeks to contribute to the debate on professional regulation by providing a critical overview of the various methods by which the work of doctors is

regulated, examining both controls from within the profession and controls from outside, and assessing their impact in practice.

The authors adopt a broad definition of regulation, taking the term to mean any form of control over behaviour. They emphasise from the outset that their interest encompasses not only formal rules and structures, such as the disciplinary jurisdiction of the General Medical Council, but also informal scrutiny, such as criticism by colleagues. In addition to providing a general theoretical background, the opening chapter introduces the reader to some of the socio-legal literature on compliance with formal rules in order to emphasise that the operation of formal rules in practice depends to a large extent on the attitudes and behaviour of the parties to the process. Those charged with enforcing rules may choose from a variety of strategies in order to achieve compliance; colleagues may be reluctant to "inform" on one another; and the rules may be only one factor among many influencing the doctors they purport to regulate.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine external "watchdog" bodies, such as the Audit Commission, the Health Advisory Service and the Health Service Commissioner. Chapters 4 and 5 assess medical self-regulation through the formal procedures of the General Medical Council, and through other techniques, such as medical audit. Chapter 6 looks at the NHS reforms of 1990 and their impact on medical work through the involvement of doctors in management and of managers in questioning medical work. The remaining chapters introduce the lay person's or patient's perspective, looking at ways in which lay people can challenge experts (for example by invoking legal rules protecting patient autonomy or involvement in user groups) and finally, at ways in which patients can voice their grievances through medical negligence litigation and complaints procedures.

Overall, the authors conclude that what they term the "web" of regulation has been growing, and while they note that excessive regulation can be counter-productive, the general tone of the book favours a further tightening of its threads. In particular, the medical profession still retains substantial control over the way in which it is regulated, and although external controls have increased, the authors doubt their efficacy. However, as the authors admit, in some circumstances

expertise is required in order to judge a professional's conduct. This expertise can only come from within the profession, instantly raising the suspicion that professionals are protecting one another. This problem admits of no easy solution, although it can be mitigated by efforts on the part of the profession to show that it does take self-regulation seriously. *Regulating Medical Work* makes an important contribution to the current debate on this issue.

The book will also be of interest to academics and others for the research agenda it sets out. It is at its best in areas in which the regulatory techniques discussed have been the subject of empirical research. The chapter on complaints procedures is a case in point, in which reference is made to a number of informative case studies, some conducted by the authors themselves. In other areas, the authors find that their aim of evaluating the impact of a technique is frustrated or hampered by the lack of research data on which to base conclusions. The gaps range from the basic and obvious, such as the lack of information on whether complainants to the Health Service Commissioner are satisfied with the redress they receive, to the more complex, such as the question of the extent to which medical negligence actions have "ripple effects" on other doctors. It is to be hoped that the research community will rise to the challenge.

Finally, the book should also satisfy its intended audience of health service managers, who will find it an accessible and thought-provoking guide to the otherwise impenetrable complex of techniques by which medical work is regulated.

A C L DAVIES

*All Souls College and Centre for
Socio-Legal Studies,
Oxford*

Euthanasia Examined: Ethical, Clinical and Legal Perspectives

Edited by John Keown, Cambridge,
Cambridge University Press, 1995,
xv+340 pages, £45.00.

One of the great difficulties with any discussion of euthanasia is that it is difficult to find any middle ground.