postmodern feminist views of the subject—has been attempted elsewhere.¹ Shildrick's aim is in many ways the opposite: to stress the unbridgeable divide between them. But this requires her to create a straw man where medical ethics ought to stand, and to present one principal strand of feminism—the French-influenced *différance* [sic] school—as representative of all feminisms.

There are some interesting byways in this book, and an admirable level of ambition. But in the end I was left with the impression that the mountain had laboured to bring forth a mouse. Medical ethics is a far more vibrant and contested field than Shildrick realises, and other bioethicists have already made many of the sceptical points about autonomy which she reaches only after considerable ferretting around: for example, when she says (page 75) that “what I am suggesting is that the injunction to respect autonomy can simply act as a prohibition or limit on certain actions rather than as a positive move to embrace the interests of the other in mutual determination”. We know that already, I think, from the work of Howard Brody and others, and it has been said better elsewhere.

References

- 1 Sherwin S. *No longer patient: feminist ethics and health care*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992. Dickenson D. *Property, women and politics: subjects or objects?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

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Feminist Approaches to Bioethics: Theoretical Reflections and Practical Applications

Rosemarie Tong, Oxford, Westview press, 1997, 280 pages, £48.50 (hb), £14.00 (pb).

Rosemarie Tong invites readers to throw caution to the wind. In doing so she asks non-feminist and feminist bioethicists to join in a collaborative effort to create a moral environment in which truly good medicine can be practised. This book, in its open and

challenging analysis of ethical theory goes a long way towards providing a foundation for the sort of dialogue needed for such an environment to be realised.

The work is remarkably crafted and clear in its descriptive accounts of predominant feminist and non-feminist approaches to ethics and bioethics. Non-feminist theory includes short descriptions and analyses of various perspectives including virtue-focused ethics, utility-orientated approaches, duty-centred themes, law and sentiment-orientated ethics. This provides a valuable context within, and against, which the author presents feminist interpretations and analyses. As such it would make an ideal introductory text and a helpful course-book for teachers of undergraduate ethics. The author challenges the diversity of interpretation in mainstream ethics theory. She confronts those who would dismiss feminist ethics as simply a gender-based inversion of a more traditional and commonly patriarchal ethic. Tong demonstrates through reasoned argument, ways in which central tenets of traditional theory are important in an ethics process and then she takes the reader skilfully forward to a reinterpretation of such themes. Her work calls for the reader, no matter how sceptical, to ask the essential “woman-question”. What might be the impact of a decision or direction on women's lives? How might a situation be articulated with a woman's voice? How are women's experiences to be understood and differentiated one from another? What does a situation “say” about relationships in which decisions are conceived, and from which they are derived and ultimately lived out? The book brings a vitality to such questions. It gives a comprehensive account of the plurality of feminist ethics, rich in philosophical and practical insight.

Tong sets out to show what makes feminist ethics distinctive but in her presentation of alternating non-feminist and feminist perspectives it is not clear that this goal is achieved fully. The approach invites significant questions about possible overlapping concepts. The somewhat false dichotomy that the style presents detracts from the author's contention that although feminists are keen to distinguish their approaches from those of non-feminists, they do not wish to reject all those principles, concepts and virtues inherent in a more traditionally Western approach to eth-

ics. Nevertheless, Tong provides, I suggest, one of the most readable, reasoned and clear accounts of feminist ethics available.

The practical applications provided in part two of the book, including reflections on contraception, sterilisation, abortion, surrogacy, reproductive technologies and genetics are insightful. These chapters are written in a way that at once challenges our applications of theory to practice, highlights significant misconceptions, suggests a possible transferral of feminist theory to a whole spectrum of experience and provides a very helpful basis for a practitioner grappling with difficult issues in contemporary social life and health care. An excellent text, not to be missed by all those interested in or working in the field of ethics and bioethics today.

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At Odds with AIDS: Thinking and Talking about a Virus

Alexander Garcia Düttmann, translated by Peter Gilgen and Conrad Scott-Curtis, California, Stanford University Press, 1996, 144 pages, £9.95.

This is a short philosophical presentation in four chapters about the impact of AIDS both positive and negative on the gay male, in relation to the individual and his place amongst his peers as well as in the society in which he lives. The discussion involves consideration of coming out, dying before one's time, and grief both for the infected and their associates, as well as of gay activism with its concomitant, violence, vocal as well as physical. You may agree or disagree and you may be impressed or otherwise with the scholarship portrayed, principally by a pretty wide ranging use of fairly extensive quotations from other philosophers. To this reviewer, untutored in Kant, Nietzsche, Sontag, Hollinghurst and many others referred to it is difficult to judge the veracity of the selected quotes or even, in their new context, their true meaning. This necessarily will limit any readership since from its very nature this book concentrates in lengthy passages on the

meaning(s) of words and propositions. However, to one dealing with the hard aspects of the real world this book does not serve the cause of the vast number of AIDS sufferers. A vocal group of AIDS sufferers, the male gays infected and possibly only a minority of these, originally supported by the tabloid press and media, are in reality the only group considered. Scant mention is given to the millions of Third World sufferers who have and who will continue to bear the consequence of infection, largely silently and with impressive stoicism. These millions are dismissed in a single brief quote which at least acknowledges their existence. A similar fate does not follow for those acquiring infection from blood products, especially the haemophiliacs or the infected children in all parts of the world who are not even referred to. The concentration on a facet of the male gay community might be justified if the concepts raised could be transposed to the larger community of those infected but, because of the very limited nature of the discussions, such a case cannot be sustained. The question that the book does again present, even if unin-

tionally, is what benefit has come to those infected from gay activists "fighting the politics of the state" etc. Judging from the position of an onlooker it would seem very little. Equally relevant to this issue must surely be the role of the press and the media in the AIDS epidemic. It was through these agencies that members of the the male gay community gained their place in the public eye as the sufferers of AIDS and very much appropriated the disease as a form of martyrdom. Parallel with and probably because of these events the medical profession failed in the early phases to maintain control and judgment over management and treatment of the disease. It also may be argued that much of the blame that was initially directed at the male gay community in the context of AIDS arose from the intervention of the press and the media, perhaps in part as a rebound to some of the manipulation of these agencies by gay activists. AIDS, its cause and consequences, is a much broader issue than the rather narrow perception that this text gives and while clearly it may be appropriate to consider a small issue within the whole, where there is

the potential to extrapolate to the wider issue, this text does not achieve this. But, maybe one is being too pragmatic and not distancing oneself from the larger issue that is AIDS.

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