

Book reviews

Rocking the Cradle: Lesbian Mothers. A Challenge in Family Living

Gillian Hanscombe and Jackie Forster. London, Sheba Feminist Publishers, 488 Kingland Road, London E8 4AE, 1983. Available from publishers by mail order, £3.50 plus 45p postage and packing.

This book would be a useful addition to any library used by the 'caring professions' and is written in an easily readable style. Quotations from various women and their children, as they talk about their lives, are interspersed between discussions of the issues involved. Books about minority groups often arouse feelings of guilt in the majority-group reader inasmuch as s/he feels uneasy about not having thought enough about the problems facing the authors or group. Also the criticism of the unhelpful or discriminatory attitudes encountered makes one feel uncomfortable.

The chapter on legal cases in which women have left their husbands for a lesbian lover show how much the prejudices of society as upheld by the legal system may militate against the welfare of the children. Isn't it time that children had a larger say in where they lived once their parents had separated? However, the idea that a man *should* support a woman underpins the risk of loss of social security entitlement that a woman in such a position faces merely because she shares her bed with a man on occasions. In this respect lesbian couples are at an advantage.

Maybe because it is so much more difficult to arrange conception in a lesbian situation, the women quoted had all thought deeply about their reasons for becoming parents and the effect of their lifestyle on the children. Little research has been done on

children reared in lesbian households but that quoted is reassuring, as are the attitudes expressed by the older children interviewed.

As an increasing number of divorces involve young children – almost 25 per cent of families are headed by a single parent who is usually a woman – our society may feel more able to accept lesbian or male homosexual couples as parents. Love for children and an ability to cater for their needs is not a monopoly of heterosexual couples and sometimes as one hears of the violence, the unthinking sexism and the misery which many couples experience in marriage one wonders how it is that conception is so easy and birth and childrearing so hard!

Apart from the occasional statement likely to alienate married people such as 'that state of legalised prostitution called marriage' the book is remarkably free of what I call 'Agit-Prop' prose and what comes across strongly to me is how necessary it is that we have a realistic education for life, human relationships, parenthood etc both in schools and at home so that people will learn not to treat homosexuals as aberrant members of society, but as human beings with a sexual orientation which, while differing from that overtly expressed by the majority of society, is equally valid and good.

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Responsibility in Health Care

Ed George J Agich. Dordrecht/Boston/London, D Reidel, Publishing Company, 1982. Dutch Florins, 90; US \$39.50.

This multi-author book is the product of an American symposium on

philosophy and medicine. It purports to present a broad inquiry into the ethics of health care, both in relation to individual behaviour and in respect of the socio-cultural, legal and political contexts of care. On closer inspection it turns out to concentrate upon responsibility in health care teams, an area of much confusion because of the enormous diversity in definition and practice where such group activities are concerned. When a number of different care-givers are jointly involved in looking after patients the vexed question of the distribution of leadership and authority is not evaded by simply employing team rhetoric. Veatch demonstrates, physicians usually retain much effective authority, however much it may be resented or disputed by other health-professionals. This volume, for instance, contains a moving *cri de coeur* from Christine Mitchell who describes how a nurse is distressed when given orders to withhold resuscitation measures from a young dying paraplegic; this conflict is here seen as a violation of the nurse's moral integrity. It almost seems as if the concept of a team may occasionally imply the commitment and group loyalty of its members against the immediate interest of an individual patient.

UK readers will readily recognise the moral dilemmas and struggles for dominance within hospital-based teams. But much of this book is naturally directed at American audiences and especially at those doctors and lawyers who are likely to have a direct personal interest in the matter of allocating responsibility for any harm or negligence which patients may experience. In Britain we are not bothered with the matter of medical consultations, in so far as these constitute an agreement between a primary care physician, a patient and an outside authority. Once a patient is referred to a hospital specialist