

do'. I did not.

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Medical Ethics in Antiquity – Philosophical Perspectives on Abortion and Euthanasia

Paul Carrick, 242 pages, Dordrecht, Holland, £27.95, Reidel Publishing Company, 1985.

Why bother to explore the origins of Western medical ethics? With the pressing and complex problems of bioethics today 'who can afford the luxury of mounting the carousel of history for yet another ride full circle from past to present'? Having moved addictively through Carrick's study, I appreciate the vigour of his response: 'Who can afford not to?' Carrick writes his philosophical history with a style that engages the reader in a dialogue with Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Galen and Seneca. More provocative is the search for the real Hippocrates whose identity is not yet established by historical evidence.

The social and scientific setting of Greek medicine is explored with two central questions asked: what scientific, socio-economic, religious and moral constraints did the average fifth or fourth century BC Greek physician experience in his daily practice of medicine and how did these factors shape his attitudes and conduct towards his patients and towards his community? Carrick does not just trip lightly over a plethora of mute historical facts; rather he unravels with rigour the presuppositions for ancient Greek and Roman beliefs about euthanasia, abortion and infanticide. The challenge to the reader is temporarily to adopt 'a fresh conceptual orientation to fully penetrate the logic of the pagan mind' on these issues. In recognising the multiple social, cultural, and religious factors forming the beliefs of the ancients, the contemporary reader can begin more assiduously to appreciate the complexity in the formation of moral beliefs in medicine.

Carrick is intent on dispelling some prevalent myths about the ancients particularly the myths of moral

uniformity among ancient physicians, the myth of dedication to the imperatives of the Hippocratic Oath and the myth that physicians constituted an elite professional group looked on with admiration by Greek and Roman lay persons. The reader is confronted with a picture of philosophical pluralism in ancient Greece and Rome. The positions of Pythagoreans are starkly contrasted with those of Plato, Aristotle and Seneca on issues of abortion and euthanasia. Ancient texts are shown to provide a diverse range of publicly admitted reasons for the justification of either infanticide or abortion which make contemporary debates about conditions for abortion seem timid by comparison! The average Greek physician probably did not swear to uphold the famous Oath of Hippocrates. 'He may never have even heard of it!' For those sceptical of such debunking, Carrick is skilled and sensitive at showing how the process of unmasking illusions about the past is a necessary step to intellectual liberation. In the domain of medical ethics today it becomes a form of evasion to continue believing that a long revered Hippocratic tradition of medicine and ethics has been supplanted by a slipshod pluralism of the late 20th century. Misleading arguments by authorities based on alleged ancient medical tradition need exposing. A sense of confidence emerges in contemporary efforts more honestly to appraise our ethical ancestry. Carrick's final message may well be that there is wisdom to be found in the ancients and applied to the present but it is not the comfortable wisdom that for too long we have been taught.

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Why Won't They Talk to me?

Linward Productions Limited,
PO Box 63, Shepperton Studio Centre,
Studios Rd, Shepperton, Middlesex
TW17 0QD.

£295 + VAT per set of five videos each
lasting about 25 minutes.

This set of five video programmes sets out to improve communications between those who are seriously ill and dying and their carers, particularly

doctors, medical students, nurses and social workers. The series demonstrates good and bad ways of talking with patients, using the skills of a group of actors who have been specially trained to recreate the emotions and reactions of patients facing serious illness. The presenters are Dr Rob Buckman, a consultant medical oncologist and also well known as a television wit, and Dr Peter Maguire, a consultant psychiatrist, whose special interest is communication skills in patient care.

On the basis of the compilation tape sent for review the series is clearly beneficial as a teaching aid, demonstrating in a vivid and dramatic way both crass and incompetent, and friendly and effective ways of talking about these painful issues. Again, judging on the basis of the compilation tape there is not much discussion or analysis of the ethical issues raised, so readers of this journal would be likely to want to supplement the content of the tapes if they used them for teaching purposes. On the other hand as a starting point for teaching concerning the doctor/patient relationship, truth-telling, dealing with conflict, and associated issues in medical ethics, the tapes can be heartily recommended as sympathetic, practical and clinically based introduction. However, although they are apparently subsidised, they are rather expensive – perhaps their expense would be justifiable within the context of libraries and teaching centres.

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Abortion: Medical Progress and Social Implications

Ciba Foundation Symposium 115, 285
pages, Avon, The Pitman Publishing
Co Ltd, 1985.

'The need to check the unlimited growth of the world's population has been accepted by most responsible authorities . . .'. So states David Baird in his introduction to the papers which form the basis of the Ciba symposium on abortion. If one accepts his first statement without enquiring as to what constitutes a responsible authority or whether there is any evidence that unlimited growth of the world's population is indeed the actual consequence if birth control methods

are not used, then the papers and discussion that follow will be absorbing. If you find yourself wanting more detailed discussion of the assumptions that Mr Baird makes in his introduction, you may be left slightly dissatisfied.

Reading through the papers, it soon becomes apparent that the reasons why women seek abortion appear to be far removed from a desire to prevent an unlimited growth of the world's population. In the United Kingdom, 98 per cent of women wish to have an abortion because of social reasons; often it is a first pregnancy. This picture appears to be reflected in other countries. The factors that influence women to take such decisions are not really discussed in this text and it is, I feel, a regrettable omission.

However, many issues are raised in the book which should provoke the reader into reflecting on his or her own ethics and practices and this is one of the strengths of presenting subject matter in this way. One of the contributors argues that it could be considered unethical to train more doctors than are necessary, as they will have to gain experience that they will never utilise at the expense of vulnerable women. Alastair Campbell spends some time discussing how the terms 'illegal' and 'untrained' are often seen as synonymous when discussing abortion. It is evident from some of the papers that legal abortions are, on occasion, performed by inexperienced personnel, whereas illegal abortions performed in certain countries, are performed by highly experienced personnel. Legality it would seem may not always be synonymous with experience or safety. The availability of abortion is also discussed. Lidija Andolsek states that abortion is seen as a basic human right in Slovenia, a statement which 'pro-life' organisations may well see as a contradiction in terms, but certainly it is an issue worthy of more detailed discussion.

This symposium does take a broad look at a wide spectrum of the issues concerned with abortion. Recent developments including the concept of 'wrongful life' are introduced and discussed. The long-term effects of abortion on both the woman and her partner are also discussed in an interesting contribution by Janet Mattinson. And the role of the doctor is discussed briefly: 'many people prefer the doctors to make the choice for them. It is not just a question of altering attitudes, but of helping people to grow up and make choices'. This comment,

made by a Jungian analyst, left me with an uncomfortable feeling that she believed that doctors had some particular expertise in this area.

Overall, this book must be welcomed for it does try to look at issues that are less than comfortable and to convey the dilemmas and quandaries that the personnel involved in abortion often face. Statistics are also included which should form a helpful reference source. There is also a surprisingly good index which is unusual in a book of this type. One is left, though, feeling that the contributors never allowed themselves to personalise the subject; it was discussed from a distance as if abortions happened to other people and were performed by other doctors. It is a sad omission that there was no attempt to find out what the effect is on doctors of performing abortions as a part of their routine work.

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Betrayers of the Truth: Fraud and Deceit in Science

William Broad and Nicholas Wade,
256 pages, Oxford, £3.95, Oxford
University Press, 1985.

This book is at once a piece of investigative journalism and an attempt to produce a critique of certain widely held beliefs about the nature of science. As the former it makes fascinating reading – who doesn't enjoy seeing the misdeeds of others, especially the great and famous, uncovered? As the latter it provides food for serious thought in two areas. First in the realm of philosophy of science, second in the realm of medical ethics.

The authors present a series of cases of malpractice in the conduct of scientific research, from the doctoring of results on the one hand to the total invention of whole experiments and projects on the other; from claiming credit for the research of others, on the part of supervisors or heads of research teams to the plagiarism of papers by editors and referees and by deft use of obscure journals as sources and repositories of publications.

But what bearing do such revelations have upon the philosophical account one gives of the status of scientific theories and of scientific knowledge? The widely held view that science offers

us value-free information about the world; that it employs only rigorous procedures in the production of theories; that its hypotheses are constantly subject to refutation by experimental testing could withstand reports of a few aberrant practitioners. But when Galileo, Newton, Dalton, Mendel and J B Watson are cited as examples of scientists who selected, improved and even forged data in accordance with theoretical convictions, the many recent cases presented take on a more considerable significance. Such a gap between philosophical theory and scientific practice is rightly seen as implausible. Given that the philosopher's work is essentially descriptive then no doubt such information as is reported in this volume must favour the account of scientific activity offered by Kuhn rather than that offered by Popper.

The explanations of these activities proffered by the authors apply equally to the world of medicine. The academic rat-race of publishing in order to establish careers and reputations has led to the appearance of no less than eight thousand journals in medicine. Authors have become adept at dividing one modest publication into three or four papers containing minimal publishable material. Co-authorships now average five authors in some medical journals. Such proliferation makes it impossible to check the authenticity of both authorship and results. Serious cases of fraudulent research from such halls of fame as the Yale and Harvard Medical Schools are attributed to this source of corruption.

The structure of research teams puts pressure on ambitious young researchers to produce results favourable to projects in hand. Lack of kudos in the mere replication of the results of others and the priority placed on originality means that little testing of the work of others occurs except with a view to improving on their results and developing their theories. These pressures are as real in medical research as elsewhere in science. The book reviews celebrated cases of fraud in the research into cancer, transplantation, drug safety and psychology resulting in the waste of large amounts of research money and the releasing of dummy hares for serious researchers to waste their time and energy chasing. In addition they may offer serious threats to public health.

But what are the cures? Here the authors' suggestions are rather thin. And who can blame them? Short of radical changes in the structure of