

The major part of the book, that is chapters 4 to 10, deals with the main philosophical, religious, moral and political arguments supporting and rejecting euthanasia, all of which are freely discussed. I felt that the chapters could have been arranged in a more logical sequence but this does not detract from the fascination of the book.

Another feature of the book which is worthy of note, is the absence of references in the text; instead an appendix in the form of 'notes on sources' is provided. The author defends this method as being less intrusive in the body of the text. I think he has a point, although a final list of references would have been useful.

My main points of concern about the book are:

1. In support of euthanasia, there is frequent reference to 'the person in agony', in excruciating pain. In my view, which is backed up by experience, medical and nursing care can now offer effective control of pain. Pain, therefore, cannot be regarded as a reason for euthanasia, but should rather be seen as a challenge to the health professions.

2. The other frequently quoted example in support of euthanasia is the baby with severe congenital defects and abnormalities. Of course, intuition and reason suggest that death would be preferable to permanent dependence, which places excessive burdens on carers. To my own surprise, my experience suggests that many parents and other carers have felt enriched by the sacrificial care they gave.

3. Accepting the profound difference between 'having a life' and 'being alive', Professor Rachels has not convinced me that he, or anyone else, can judge the 'life' experience of another: an experience is, by definition, personal and unique to the person having it.

4. The 'slippery slope' argument, often produced in opposition to euthanasia, and exemplified by the Nazi atrocities, is discussed by the author, who dismisses it as a relevant analogy on the grounds that the term 'euthanasia' is misused in such an argument. Having come uncomfortably close to that situation, I do not feel able to agree with him. It was a prominent part of the Nazi ideology that the 'impure', such as the misshapen and the pain-tortured, could not 'have a life': they were inadequate for modern society and, on utilitarian grounds, greater happiness for all would be achieved by their extermination.

5. In his final chapter, Professor Rachels makes a case for legalising

euthanasia. This, he suggests, could be done quite 'simply' by accepting a plea of mercy-killing as a defence against a charge of homicide, in much the same way as a plea of self-defence is acceptable. He relates examples of judges' leniency in cases of 'mercy killing' where the accused has been put on probation rather than committed to prison. However, not only is a period of probation an indisputable form of punishment: he himself agrees that courts are not always so lenient. In my view, it would be dangerous, to say the least, to leave a verdict on such a delicate issue to the whims of judges who, unfortunately, are not beyond human failure or even corruption.

In conclusion, this is a book in which the complex and highly relevant topic of euthanasia and morality has been fairly and sensitively treated and which deserves to be read, studied and widely discussed. It is controversial, stimulating and instructive and I commend it warmly to all who are concerned with and about living, dying and having life.

LISBETH HOCKEY

formerly Director, Nursing Studies
Research Unit,
University of Edinburgh

The Foundations of Bioethics

H Tristram Engelhardt Jr, 398 pages,
New York, £24.00, US\$27.95, Oxford
University Press, 1986

The Foundation of Bioethics is presented as the first full-scale treatment of the subject by a single author. Engelhardt, a professor of both medicine and philosophy, and the editor of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* is well placed to provide it. His book has inevitably attracted much advance attention from prominent figures in the field. One of them, James Childress, describes it as 'a philosophical justification for a secular pluralist morality based on the limits of authority and reason', although the author himself stresses that his initial intent was rather the opposite. In trying, and failing, to justify a particular view of the good life by reason alone, Engelhardt came to see 'with dismay and sorrow' the inevitability of secular pluralism. He clearly regrets the resultant intellectual untidiness, but proceeds to examine with gusto its implications for the practice of medicine and health care policy.

The author traces the origins of pluralism back to the break-up of the Christian consensus, beginning with Luther, and the scientific revolution, beginning with Copernicus. He then follows it forward to the brink of nihilism, from which we are rescued by a morality based on the recognition by reason of two fundamental (and at times conflicting) principles, namely the utilitarian requirement of beneficence, and the Kantian requirement of respect for autonomy. The proper application of these leads to the building of what the author calls 'the peaceable community', from whose features he goes on to derive an account of what it is to be a person: namely, a self-conscious rational moral agent possessed of autonomy.

Using this central concept of person, Engelhardt pursues a variety of avenues to a wide range of practical conclusions, which are often controversial. He would, for example, permit liberalised abortion, some fetal experimentation, limited infanticide of defective newborn babies, euthanasia, and the declaration as dead of those lacking higher brain-centre functions. In addition, he spends a chapter each on the requirement for informed consent, the rights to health care, and the nature of nosology, all from the same perspective. Throughout, the text is extensively annotated, with well-selected but not exhaustive references, and a good index.

Such a unifying enterprise as this stands or falls with its central premisses: and for Engelhardt they are essentially political. He has an ideal, the peaceable community, in which many groups of different religious and political leanings co-exist by virtue of common acknowledgement of the limits, set by reason, to the force they can use on others of different persuasions. This is all very well: but the weak point in Engelhardt's treatise is to argue from such a political notion to the nature of persons, rather than vice versa. If personhood is so crucial to the settling of issues of practical policy, it is difficult to accept that it is at the same time derivative of a conception of the ideal political community.

Whether it is more appropriate to argue from the nature of man to the nature of his community or the reverse is an old dispute. What is new in Engelhardt's book is the attempt to relate, at its root, political philosophy to practical issues in medical ethics. As such, it is an ambitious and admirable effort, comprehensive in scope and challenging in content. In the words of another prominent commentator,

Edmund Pellegrino, it cannot be ignored.

DR S G POTTS
*Harkness Fellow, Visiting Scholar,
Kennedy Institute of Ethics,
Georgetown University, Washington DC,
USA*

Ethics in Nursing: the Caring Relationship

Verena Tschudin, 151 pages, London, £5.95, Heinemann Nursing, 1986

A discussion of 'ethics relevant to nursing' or 'nursing ethics' should perhaps define the realms of nursing and ethics and so explain why a text on the subject is necessary. Tschudin relates the rise of nursing ethics to the new awareness of professional responsibilities among nurses. Individualised care and the nursing process has, she claims, made nurses much more involved with the feelings and rights of the patients they care for. They therefore require more knowledge and understanding of both the proper processes of decision-making and of ethical dilemmas which have to be tolerated. This book is proposing to help by providing information and guidance.

Perhaps what is seen as most special to nursing by Tschudin is the caring nature of the work. The first chapter of the book is occupied by an explanation of a caring relationship. In one sense this is slightly puzzling as the reader searches for what is pertinent to ethical matters. However, subsequent chapters become more relevant and applied to the work of nurses with patients. After another abstract section on ethical theories the writer includes complete copies of the codes of conduct for nurses issued by the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing and the Royal College of Nursing, which should be useful to students or those who are unprofessional enough not to have studied them previously!

It is really the last section of the book in which three chapters discuss ethical decisions, issues and dilemmas, that may seem most familiar to nurses of any grade. Useful strategies for studying issues and making decisions are outlined and based on the classic ethical principles of 'value of life', 'goodness or rightness', 'justice or fairness', 'truth telling or honesty' and 'individual freedom'.

This subject of ethics in nursing may

be seen as so important for practitioners, as indeed the author believes, that it is difficult for a tiny book to do it justice, even as an introduction. Although Verena Tschudin has tried to integrate nursing and ethical issues, some sections seem slightly simplistic while others are rather sophisticated. For instance the contrast between the rather pseudo-philosophical section on caring (at 'O' level standard) with the clear, academic, well-referenced style of subsequent sections on theories and values is startling. However, this is not a unique problem for nursing authors in seeking for an appropriate level and a reasonable price. Just as nursing is changing to expect a more scientific and rational basis for care so readers should deserve that level of material. Tschudin demonstrates how this can be done usefully for students and others in some later chapters.

Students could benefit from this as an introduction to stimulate thought and interest in this area but of course the subject certainly deserves more advanced work.

JENIFER WILSON-BARNETT
*Professor in Nursing Studies
King's College,
London*

Ethical Issues in Psychosurgery

John Kleinig, 152 pages, London £5.95 soft cover, £15.00 hard cover, George Allen & Unwin, 1985.

This is a balanced and thoughtful book. It is one of a series of 'Studies in applied philosophy', under the editorship of Brenda Cohen and Anthony O'Hear. The author of this particular volume is a senior lecturer in philosophy at Macquarie University in the USA.

The book attempts to cover a wide range of topics within its brief length, and so the space devoted to each is limited. A summary of the historical development of psychosurgical techniques is followed by a resumé of problems associated with psychiatric classification and diagnosis, and a summary of the particular conditions for which psychosurgery has been used as a form of treatment. A particularly good chapter focusing on the issue of consent considers the justifications for requiring consent, its validity, and the possible coercive influences on patients in hospital. There is a sensitive discussion about the inequality of power and influence between doctors

and institutionalised patients, and the author argues that the inequality of bargaining position does not necessarily demonstrate the patient's decisions are not voluntary, but that it is a factor which detracts from the ideal of voluntariness, and needs to be carefully considered.

The particular features of psychosurgery which have caused concern are discussed, and the problems of establishing proper criteria of effectiveness are well summarised. Kleinig dissects out four understandings of therapeutic success, namely the achievement of symptom removal, manageability of behaviour, attainment in particular psychological tests, and the notion of restoration. The limitations of each criterion are noted, and the literature evaluating psychosurgery is critically reviewed.

A final chapter on the 'social dimensions' of psychosurgery emphasises the general need for independent systems of checks and balances to ensure that the individual transactions of doctors and patients operate within a socially acceptable framework. Independent review panels are suggested as one means of providing this. The requirement of an independent second opinion, introduced in the 1983 Mental Health Act, might be a further example. Kleinig concludes that such supervision '... need not be seen as the undermining of trust, as some fear, but rather as an attempt to provide an environment in which trust may flourish without abuse and disappointment'.

Kleinig carefully exposes many of the logical errors and dubious claims which have surrounded the subject, and he recognises that psychosurgical procedures have benefited a number of patients. He rightly sees that a patient's individual consent is not a sufficient safeguard against possible misuse of potentially hazardous procedures. As an outsider to the psychiatric world he asks: 'What does it betray about our conception of others if we are willing to subject them to serious risks merely because they are willing to give consent'. His book is a useful contribution to the debate.

ADRIAN GROUNDS
*Lecturer in Forensic Psychiatry
Institute of Psychiatry, London*