traced to that feeling associated with 'the sense of being male or female'.

Finally, the chapter on the ethical aspects of sex-reassignment and its possible consequences for the future, must be mentioned. It was beyond the scope of this collection to include a lengthy tract on the ethical issues. Nevertheless, this chapter is superficial being only an inadequate summary of the problems. It is concluded with a personal recommendation that the operations, when therapeutic, be allowed to proceed.

Unfortunately, Ross continues by urging 'extreme caution' with respect to its recipients bearing (by abdominal surgery) or adopting children. Against this recommendation it can be argued that sex-reassignment is only ethical if transsexuality is a genuine sex/gender disorder. In which case, the sufferer must be perceived as one who has, through no fault of his/her own, been 'trapped' within an unsuitable body, undergone a series of potentially dangerous, painful, therapeutic operations and has been rendered infertile as a result. Within this context it is unjust to declare that the transsexual is therefore ipso facto unsuitable to rear children, which is what Ross implies.

This publication is a reminder of the philosophical objections to current diagnostic techniques for transsexuality, and also of the ethical problems inherent in the use of the sex-change operation as a treatment for the transsexual condition. Hopefully, it will renew and broaden debate of these issues.

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Ethical Issues in Death and Dying


In this second edition of a text originally published in 1977 the editor has incorporated several new articles together with a series of current legal (USA) examples relevant to the six sections of the book: Truth-telling; Determining and defining death; Selective non-treatment of handicapped newborns; Responsibility regarding treatment of critically ill and dying patients; Euthanasia; and Suicide.

Robert Weir is Professor of Philosophy at Oklahoma State University where he teaches biomedical ethics. There is a wealth of information contained within this book which should assist discussion of some very basic ethical issues. By concentrating on the many of these issues are brought into sharp focus and the selection of articles and court cases does provide many contrasting views on each topic. For example, on truth-telling, the book looks at attitudes amongst doctors and doctors and in the way in which they have changed over a sixteen-year period. Whilst many doctors may 'share the truth' in response to patient demand the grounds for doing so are still arbitrary and emotional. The complexity of deciding what a patient wants and needs to know is very well illustrated, with Weir stating that truth-telling is a moral obligation in medicine more than a mere legal requirement or doctor-controlled privilege. He gives three reasons for this: that paternalism is not a sufficient reason for withholding relevant information, that patients are autonomous people, and that the contractual nature of the doctor/patient relationship is founded on trust. Weir writes: 'The point is that patients have a right to the truth and truthfulness — communicated with compassion, understandable language, empathy and respect' (page 46).

The section on determining death is interesting but based very much on the American legal situation and therefore not as readily applicable to this country. The section on treatment abstention has a lot of useful information on such areas as 'living wills', the responsibility of a doctor towards hopelessly ill people and the patient's role in decision-making. A very helpful article discusses the 'least worst death' and the ways in which respect for patient autonomy may lead to cruel results not always anticipated by those advocating 'natural death'.

The book is written by an American, for Americans, and must be seen as such. Certain words in the text might require one to reach for the dictionary (USA edition) for clarification (for example 'fiduciary' and 'egregious'). However, it is a useful publication for those who wish to have easier access to some of the legal decisions made in recent years which have affected clinical practice in America and which might influence practice in this country in the next few years.

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Care of the Handicapped Newborn: Parental Responsibility and Medical Responsibility


Most mothers dread the possibility of bearing an abnormal baby. The reality of coping with this event is the subject of this booklet which addresses the bioethical management issues which are raised. It is the product of a multidisciplinary working party of the Roman Catholic Church. The underlying assumption of the booklet is the equality of human rights of every baby to the care and support of the community in which he or she is born. An argument is developed to support the contention that it is an illusion to think that judgements about the worthwhileness of a patient's life can form the basis for clinical treatment. Thus the emphasis of the authors is unequivocally to avoid any situation in which the primary object of management decisions results in any hastening of a child's death.

There are sections on the status of the newborn, and the nature of treatments available, discussing the factors which would need to be taken into account in deciding whether or not treatment would be of benefit to a particular baby. Several questions are clearly outlined. They include: the burdensome character of some therapies, the realistic prognosis for the child, and the relative availability of resources, be they financial or medical and nursing expertise. Several specific disorders are described in relation to the management strategies adopted; a useful glossary of medical terminology is provided. Spina bifida and Down's syndrome are two conditions which are examined in closer detail since they are frequently encountered. This is a subject area which arouses deep emotions and it is not unusual for many of those involved to experience genuine differences of opinion. Advice is given for some specific situations such as where parents feel their child's rights are not being respected; the paediatrician faced with parents who reject their handicapped child, and the nurse who regards her instructions as being immoral.

The booklet ends with a section on the role of the Church and society, emphasising the dignity of humanity and
Health: The Foundations for Achievement

David Seedhouse, 104 pages, Chichester, £5.95, John Wiley & Sons, 1986

Most ethical problems in medicine arise as a result of new developments designed to reduce morbidity and mortality and increase health. But what exactly is meant by the term 'health'? The author of this text is a professional philosopher who addresses this question in depth. A dictionary definition is certainly not sufficient. Nor is the often quoted definition of health, as being the absence of disease, helpful, since it merely emphasises only one aspect of the problem - namely the medical. Confusion arises because the term is ambiguous and may have different meanings for different people - the so-called ' idols of the Market Place' of Francis Bacon.

The difficulties are exemplified in seven brief case histories; a young man who suffers from delusions which affect his work, a middle-aged married man whose only leisure activity is watching TV, a young woman who is now paraplegic following a car accident, a mother with cancer of the breast, an unemployed couple, a West-Indian youth on probation, and a successful businessman who drinks and smokes too much. The health status of each of these individuals is considered from the point of view of a doctor, a social scientist, an 'idealist', and a humanist.

It soon becomes clear that each has different ideas as to who is healthy and who is not.

The author then proceeds to discuss various theories of health, including the idea of 'human potential', and concludes that '... all theories of health and all approaches designed to increase health are intended to advise against, to prevent the creation of, or to remove, obstacles to the achievement of human potential (my italics). These obstacles may be biological, environmental, societal, familial or personal'.

However, the author is quick to emphasise that the individual's potential should be realistic given his age and situation. Thus health is considered as 'the foundations for achievement' in biological, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, creative and recreational terms. Viewed in this broader context then none of the seven cases might be considered really healthy.

Finally, the author argues that this concept of health broadens the scope of health education from merely emphasising disease prevention to actually creating health through getting individuals to recognise their potentials for achievement. An interesting and provocative book which is well worth reading.

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Bioethics and Belief: Religion and Medicine in Dialogue


This is a reprint of a book first published in 1984. Then it had the Imprint of the Archdiocese of Westminster. Subsequently there were protests in some Roman Catholic circles that the book was not in conformity on certain aspects of medical ethics with that Church’s teaching, and that some conclusions advanced in it were at variance with that teaching and therefore erroneous.

This is particularly the case with respect to the moral status to be recognised in the early embryo of the human species. In June 1986 the Imprint was withdrawn and the book now appears without it. Later in that year Mahoney, one of the most distinguished moral theologians in Britain, succeeded to the Chair of Moral and Social Theology in King's College, London. In the first instance therefore, this book must be of great interest to Roman Catholics. But it has a much wider relevance. Mahoney's clear and concise moral reasoning on some of the most important current issues in medical ethics basically depends on the recognition of an element of mystery in life, especially human life, which leads to a certain reverence in thought and action in relation to it. He himself relates it to Christian belief, but it can be widely shared by those of other faiths and philosophies, and one hopes it would be a brash person who did not share it. Mahoney works out its implications almost entirely in relation to recent Roman Catholic documents, but it is easy to place them in a wider context. The sting for the Roman Catholic Church, which is liable to overcall the authority and fixity of what is not strictly claimed to be infallible teaching, comes when Mahoney shows that in some cases different conclusions are possible from the same premises, and that in some others there are inconsistencies behind the reasoning of official documents. He is the more persuasive because he handles the documents with scrupulous care and respect. Presumably that is why the book was at first given the Imprint.

In questions of human fertility and control he shows that procreation is a complex phenomenon and not merely a biological one, and that this allows for the legitimacy in certain circumstances of new human powers of control of fertility. He considers issues in death and dying, and in medical research and experiments on human subjects. The chapter on the beginning of life included the most detailed of the author's discussions on the nature of the human person, and it is the one place where he does seem to get entangled in a legacy of Aristotelian-Roman Catholic teaching. This teaching concerns the concept of the soul as a material, spiritual substance created by God in an act of direct and immediate creation. Mahoney at first seems to go along with this to a surprising extent, but he concludes that 'the traditional Christian philosophical and theological doctrine of the human soul is in a thoroughly unsatisfactory state, particularly in the light of embryological studies' (p100). These are wise words, but the thought is not new. It is a pity that the Vatican authorities do not take them to heart.

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In Search of the Modern Hippocrates

Roger J Bulger, editor, 256 pages, Iowa, $27.50, University of Iowa Press, 1987

According to the editor, this collection of 17 essays was compiled in the belief that the Hippocratic oath needed