**Book reviews**

**Ethics and the Health Services Manager**

Andrew Wall, 117 pages, London, 1989, King’s Fund, £8.95

The ethical framework within which health service managers operate has been little discussed. Andrew Wall’s book seeks to fill the gap that exists by identifying and analysing a range of the dilemmas faced by managers. As someone who has worked in the NHS for over 30 years, most recently as the General Manager of Bath Health Authority, Wall is well-placed to take on this task, and he does so in a practical and informative manner.

*Ethics and the Health Services Manager* provides examples of the ethical issues facing managers across a wide range of areas. The longest chapter focuses on ethics and the patient. This chapter examines issues such as the right of patients to individuality, privacy and to give their consent to treatment. Later chapters include discussion of ethics and the public, employment, the law and research.

As Wall explains at the beginning of the book, his aim is to write a practical handbook not a treatise on moral philosophy. In this he succeeds admirably. The book will be particularly useful in the education and development of managers, not least as a tool and resource for teachers wanting to challenge managers to be more explicit about the principles which guide their decisions.

The book is written in a way which avoids setting out a formal code of conduct embracing definitive rules. Instead, Wall concentrates on highlighting issues likely to confront managers and he uses these to raise questions about the appropriate response. In some cases, he answers these questions categorically by stating his own view, in others it is left to the reader to decide how to respond.

*Ethics and the Health Services Manager* is well written and a welcome contribution to a relatively neglected area of debate. There are, however, two areas in which it might be strengthened. First, the author has a tendency to wander beyond his brief and to comment on related issues not central to his main theme. An example is his treatment of the role of health authorities where the more analytical, questioning approach which characterises much of the book descends into mere opinion.

Second, this reviewer would have welcomed more discussion of ethics and politics. At a time when the public stance taken by the NHS Chief Executive on the NHS reforms has aroused much debate, managers appear to be being drawn increasingly into political discussion. Wall touches on the dilemmas in this area but a more extended treatment would have been valuable.

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**Denken-Schreiben-Töten: Zur neuen “Euthanasie”-Diskussion und zur Philosophie Peter Singer**

*(Thinking-Writing-Killing: Toward the Recent Euthanasia Debate and the Philosophy of Peter Singer)*


This collection of essays was among the first of what is now a flood of books following in the wake of the Singer Affair. The 1989 incident began when an anti-euthanasia coalition learned that the Australian philosopher Peter Singer was among the speakers at a European Symposium on the mentally handicapped, sponsored by Lebenshilfe and the Bishop Bekkers Institute with the support of the Federal Minister for Health. The coalition was comprised of associations for the handicapped, the German Society for Social Psychiatry, AIDS Help, Greenpeace and Anti-nuclear organisations, and feminist groups. Using the protest tactics in which they are practised, the coalition prompted Singer’s removal from the symposium programme and later denied him a podium at Dortmund University. The coalition was explicit about the free speech issue: it claimed a moral obligation to inhibit public discussion that ‘places the right [of the handicapped] to life in question’.

The Bastian volume states the case of the coalition on the euthanasia issue. It consists of seven essays, mostly by academic doctors and philosophers, plus two essays that appeared in the press during the days of controversy. The essays are not merely reactive; indeed Singer’s views on euthanasia are construed as illustrative of medical trends that are the primary object of criticism.

It is a major thesis of this study that the philosophical defence of euthanasia is not to be taken at face value. Contributors contextualise it within the broad tradition of utilitarian philosophy as a social technology for a society in which consumer choice and economic rationalism are prime system-supporting values (Klaus Dorner, K L Rost, Herbert Begemann). The euthanasia movement is interpreted as a consumer interest masking a specific instance of capitalism’s ‘medicalisation of social problems’. The problem is to