

Book reviews

Ethical practice in clinical medicine

William J Ellos, 190 pages, London/New York, 1990, Routledge, £35.00 hb, £8.99 pb

This is a book which sets out to bring together, on the one hand, a number of the key philosophical/ethical theories which have shaped western moral thinking, and on the other, a selection of case studies with which to ground the theories. It is not entirely clear why the attempt is less than satisfactory for the reader, given the undoubted strengths of the book but this reviewer was left with a sense of frustration at what might have been achieved in this book, and was not.

William Ellos notes that 'Too many massive texts in medical ethics remain unread and unused'. In dealing with the contributions of Platonic and Aristotelian thought, tracing through the role of Thomism and the Scots and American moral philosophers, and touching on contemporary developments, he has linked each of these areas with illustrative case studies, ranging in their points of focus from the communication of potentially devastating prognoses to the decisions involved in responding to a 'living will'. The concise discussions of the various theoretical approaches to ethical thought are clear, and the case studies are apposite. To have both within one book promises very well.

But the move from theory to case-study is not always smooth, and gives the impression on occasion of a text on theory into which case-studies have been inserted. Given that the book is directed at 'the busy health practitioner', this impression is likely to overshadow the real advantages of bringing together in this way accounts of the theoretical basis of much medical-ethical decision-making and 'samples'

of such decision-making in practice.

This is a book which demands of its readers a considerable level of attention – but which repays careful study. It could form the basis for a course or seminar in health-care ethics, in which context its oddly intrusive switches into question-setting and discussion-starting mode would be more at home than when read by an individual.

BRENDAN CALLAGHAN SJ,
*Heythrop College,
University of London.*

Child abuse

Christina Lyon and Peter de Cruz, 207 pages, Bristol, 1990, Jordans and Sons Ltd, £14.95 pb

Child abuse – sexual or non-sexual – is one of the most unpleasant features of our society. For some, child sexual abuse is so unpleasant as to be almost inconceivable. That adults can systematically and over a considerable period sexually exploit children, sometimes as young as three (occasionally even younger), defies the imagination. And yet it is not uncommon, as evidenced by the daily stream of cases which come to the attention of social workers or the courts, or which are reported anonymously by children to the telephone lines which are dedicated to the receipt of such complaints.

How we should respond to the problem is a matter of some difficulty. Excessive zeal on the part of social workers and doctors may be seen as unduly interventionist (as happened in Cleveland); inadequate attention to the problem may bring accusations of neglect of duty (as in the case of the seven-year-old Maria Colwill, killed by her violent stepfather in 1973). Somewhere in between these two

extremes lies a mean response which demonstrates real and effective concern for the protection of those at risk while at the same time not allowing an intrusive State to trample over parental rights. After all, many of the concerns which have been voiced at the various public inquiries into individual cases of alleged abuse have their origin in a parental sense of outrage over what may be seen as high-handed and unjustified intrusions into the family – intrusions based on flimsy and disputed medical evidence and the unsubstantiated allegations of young children.

Child Abuse by Lyon and de Cruz is a wideranging and quite detailed survey of the legal response to the issue. It is unfortunate that the authors wrote their book at a time of significant change in the law in England and Wales, but this was perhaps unavoidable. The legislative timetable of the Children Act of 1989 took many by surprise and the legal changes it embodied are being implemented slowly. The authors have taken account of this in their survey of the new law, but inevitably the reader will have to proceed with caution and check up that what he or she reads has not been overtaken by the implementation of provisions in the recent legislation. This does not detract unduly, however, from the very real value of the book, which contains a great deal of legal material which survives the changes. Indeed, there is nothing else which matches this book for its collection of all the law relating to the various forms of abuse and neglect to which children may be subjected by adults.

For those with an interest in medical ethics, *Child Abuse* may seem somewhat technical, but is still worth consulting for the light which it sheds on procedures regarding child welfare. For example, there is discussion of the medical examination and treatment of children who have been removed from parents suspected of abusing them, and