Book reviews

Pharmacy ethics

Edited by Mickey Smith, Steven Strauss, H John Baldwin and Kelly T Alberts, New York, Pharmaceutical Products Press, 1991, 555 pages, hc $59.95, sc $27.95

The editors of this book say in the foreword that its 'primary audience will be pharmacy students enrolled in a basic ethics course'.

It consists of some seventy previously published papers, several as brief as two pages, and an eighty-page section of cases with ethical commentary. Also included are the codes of ethics of the American Pharmaceutical Association and the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, the patients' bill of rights of the American Hospital Association, the consumers' bill of rights of the Mississippi Pharmacy Association and the World Health Organisation definition of 'health'.

The papers cover a vast range of topics. Many discuss ethical issues in ways which are relevant to all healthcare professionals. Topics include: the definition of health; informed consent; paternalism and respect for autonomy; withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment; experimentation on humans; allocation of resources to the elderly; individual responsibility for health, and professional responsibility for health promotion. Other papers relate these and other issues specifically to aspects of pharmacy - for instance: drug rationing and drug substitution, the use of psychotropic drugs, community pharmacy practice, the profit motive in pharmacy, the sale of tobacco and 'unnecessary' food supplements, drugs in sport and the development of pharmaceuticals by genetic engineering. There is also a discussion of capital punishment and pharmacy - a controversial issue in the US, where death may be brought about pharmaceutically.

Some of the brief papers could be used as 'consciousness-raising' exercises to initiate student debate over a wide spectrum of issues, while others are more substantial. As students should find almost all the papers readily understandable, the book provides a source which can be selectively 'mined' for material appropriate to an ethics course. But selection would be required, particularly for courses outside the United States, since many of the papers were originally published in American journals and discuss procedures, situations and law within that country.

Moreover, as several of the articles date from before the eighties, and some of these are concerned with developments in pharmacy at the time they were written, their relevance is limited. While there is a valuable review of the history of pharmacy ethics, it is disappointing that more papers have not been included which are concerned to break new ground for readers today.

Where the book does contribute something both new and extremely valuable, however, is in the final section on cases and commentary. This section begins with an excellent introduction to ethical theories and to applied ethics, and this is followed by what, according to the foreword, is a series of 'original cases, the selection of which were based on a national survey of pharmacy faculty to determine what is or should be taught in a pharmacy ethics course, and what kinds of teaching materials are needed'. After each case there is full but concise commentary on its ethical aspects. These discussions are impressive: they draw on a rich variety of philosophical sources - including both the historical and most recent - and consider some subtle conceptual issues, yet they always maintain a lively clarity and relevance to the case.

After each commentary there is an up-to-date reference section, a list of the key concepts in the analysis and some questions for further discussion. The authors have here produced a valuable source of material which will be a boon to teachers and students alike.

RICHARD ROWSON, Humanities Department, University of Glamorgan.

Down the slippery slope: arguing in applied ethics

David Lamb, Beckenham, Croom Helm Ltd, 1988, ix + 134 pages, hc £30.00

The 'slippery slope' form of argument which David Lamb discusses in this book is frequently employed in medical and other contexts by opponents of some proposed liberalisation of law or morals. They claim that whereas what is proposed may be acceptable in itself, it will lead by gradual but inevitable stages down the slippery slope to an intolerable result. For example, the legalising of euthanasia has sometimes been opposed on the ground that it will eventually lead to the killing of those who are socially, politically or racially undesirable. The thesis of this book is that this type of argument is extremely important in ethical debate, because it draws attention to dangers in innovation that are too easily overlooked.

Lamb begins with an account of the nature of slippery-slope arguments; following James Rachels, he distinguishes a logical and a psychological form. Crudely, the logical form
maintains that acceptance of some \textit{prima facie} desirable practice is wrong because it would logically commit us to accepting a series of other, undesirable practices. The psychological form maintains that if certain practices are once accepted, other undesirable practices will in fact come to be accepted. As becomes clear later in the book, these two forms of argument can often be combined: loose concepts, it is claimed, can and will be stretched under pressure of a prevailing climate of opinion to cover circumstances not originally envisaged by those who accepted the first steps.

The discussion of Nazi policy which follows examines what is often thought to be the paradigm case of sliding down the slippery slope, in order to see whether we can learn from this case. Here the main points tend to be somewhat obscured amid the detail of argument, but Lamb does claim that, like the Nazis, if for different reasons, we are nowadays starting to say that some lives are not worth living, and that this is the beginning of a slope.

Lamb himself espouses a principle that all lives are worth living (in themselves, not just to their lives - a sort of secular equivalent of the notion of the sanctity of human life). Sometimes he seems to say that all suicide and euthanasia is wrong because of this principle. At other times he invokes slippery-slope considerations, such as the inherent vagueness of the concepts of rationality, voluntariness, autonomy and so on, to argue against legalising euthanasia. His arguments are very ingenious, but I found them unconvincing - particularly as rationality and autonomy seem to underpin the right to refuse treatment, which Lamb does wish to uphold. There is much detailed argument about euthanasia, including a brief treatment of cost-benefit arguments. In comparison, the treatment of \textit{in vitro} fertilisation, genetic engineering and abortion is rather cursory. An important and interesting topic, that of the respect due to human tissue, is introduced but not sufficiently developed, and I remain unclear why Lamb seems happier about abortion than about euthanasia.

I suspect that this book is really about euthanasia rather than slippery-slope arguments. Lamb wishes to argue against legalising euthanasia for both value-of-life and slippery-slope reasons, though the latter are not always set out in a way which clearly displays their nature. He argues that while some cases of euthanasia may be morally acceptable, there is no safe way of codifying this fact. The book is closely argued, thought-provoking and in general well written (though the Oxford English Dictionary does say that the word ‘beneficient’, often used, is an erroneous form). Anyone interested in euthanasia would benefit from reading this book, although they might not be converted.

\textbf{ELIZABETH TELFER, Department of Philosophy, University of Glasgow.}

\section*{Sickness and health}


This major novel, the title of which gives no indication of content, takes the reader behind the visible façade of respectable medical life. It is a vivid story of two generations of doctors and patients, with all their desires, ambitions, disappointments and heartaches. Written in Douglas's typical style, which combines wit, satire, cynicism, insight and realism, it captures the life experiences of people who represent various epochs in the history of the National Health Service.

In an unusual and most effective way, the author sets the scene with the funeral, in 1979, of a well respected doctor, who met an untimely and mysterious death. He then goes back in time to 1949, the year of the implementation of the NHS in Scotland, where the whole novel is acted out. Colourful vignettes depict and highlight important epochs. With a non-descriptive title, the four section headings are important: 1. We are making a new world; 2. Victories of science; 3. The long surprise; and 4. The health you can afford. They depict the early visions of the health service, the anguish of the medical rat race, the prejudices against female medics and some of the life/death decisions taken overtly or covertly. Ethical issues are cleverly woven into the fabric and, thus, the book earns itself a review in this journal.

As a reviewer who worked in the NHS from its inception, I can appreciate the realism of the novel. It is uncannily possible to identify with the doctors, medical students, nurses and patient who act out their fictitious roles. Thus the book is valuable in bringing to life some of the many non-fictional historical accounts of this era in the NHS.

On the negative side, I missed an index and some sort of an author’s introduction, setting out his aims and direction. It took me quite a while to get my bearings. In parts, I found the style and language somewhat crude and lacking in sensitivity, but maybe this reflects the author’s perception of the world which he so vividly presents to his readers. The novel deserves to be read; its subtleties are intriguing.

\textbf{LISbeth Hovey, Honorary Reader in Nursing Research, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh.}

\section*{Challenges in caring: explorations in nursing and ethics}


Increasing awareness of professional responsibilities has caused members of the caring professions to look even more closely at the nature and underlying principles of their practice: nursing is a case in point. Increased professionalisation and access to higher education (there are now some 20 nursing degree courses in the United Kingdom) has raised awareness of the need to form a view, and sometimes adopt a stance, on issues which past generations of nurses may well have left to others, most notably, the medical or legal professions; ethics is a case in point. The regulatory bodies for nursing, midwifery and health visiting have, over recent years, suggested professional/ethical principles around which nursing can be conceptualised and from which practitioners can derive support. Without being over-prescriptive, such guidelines provide focus and promote discussion of ethical issues faced daily by many nurses.

\textbf{Challenges in Caring: Explorations in Nursing and Ethics sets out to examine a range of topics, most of which occasion public and professional debate. Written by two philosophers and a nurse, the book attempts to discuss ethical principles in the light of real-life ethical dilemmas often faced by nurses. This two-pronged approach is exemplified by the open-}