

ing line: 'Am I going to die, nurse?' It is developed well in early chapters but, curiously, the nursing aspects then tend to fade away.

Faced with such a book, it is always tempting for a reviewer to ponder the choice and balance of topics: why some are included and others left out. Also, when attempts are made to build bridges between academic disciplines and the social realities of nursing (a graveyard for many aspiring authors) balance and relevance are all-important if the reader's attention is to be held. Overall, this reviewer appreciated the choice of topics but found it curious that pressing and timely issues such as contraception, population explosion, mental health, and substance abuse are not considered, whereas abortion and reproductive technology receive extensive coverage: perhaps the latter are viewed as more directly health-related but many nurses might question this assumption.

The first two chapters, on moral thinking and moral deliberation introduce basic ideas. Chapters three to eight are highly relevant to nurses, with many important aspects of practice discussed. However, the book is patchy in its coverage: chapters eight to twelve covering abortion, reproductive technology, death and dying, and respecting life, depart from the earlier style of combining ethics with nurse/patient situations: it is as if the effort required to achieve such a rapprochement ran out of steam. The text remains interesting as a straight debate on medical ethics but nurses may feel an opportunity was lost. Professional matters reappear in the final two chapters. There are some useful appendices.

This book would make a useful text for students of nursing ethics and for stimulating debate on ethical aspects of care. Nurse teachers could draw on it selectively for a range of pre-registration courses.

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The nature of moral thinking

Francis Snare, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, 187 pages, £30.00 hc, £9.99 pb

The preface to this book says '*The Nature of Moral Thinking* will satisfy the intellectually curious student, providing a solid and fair discussion of the classical philosophical questions about our moral thinking, surveying the main types of meta-ethical and normative ethical theories ...'. Whether that is a fair assessment depends in part on what is meant by 'student'.

If it means someone studying moral philosophy in an institution of higher education, exposed to lectures, tutorials, classes, and other reading on the subject, then this book – which is based on the author's first-year lectures at Sydney University – could well prove a valuable handbook. Although it does not engage with live moral issues such as may arise in health care (the preface explains: 'Discussions of applied ethics are certain to be circumscribed unless underlying philosophical assumptions about deeper, more general issues are treated'), it touches on most of the topics with which moral philosophy has traditionally been concerned. I particularly enjoyed Snare's extended discussions of Plato's *Euthyphro* problem and of psychological egoism, and he is good at picking out varieties of relativism and subjectivism and shooting down sloppy-minded arguments that tend to get propagated in these areas.

On the debit side, it is a pity that, of the standard meta-ethical theories, he gives scant attention to intuitionism. Second, I think it was an error of judgement to include a chapter on the relativist theory of truth suggested in Plato's *Theaetetus*. It is based on lectures by David Armstrong, a colleague of Snare's, and stands as a self-contained set-piece, impressive in itself but insufficiently connected to the book's official subject-matter of moral philosophy. Third, Snare makes little reference to the debates of the past decade about what has come to be called 'moral realism'. Perhaps these debates are too sophisticated for an introductory book; perhaps they merely offer new glosses on old positions; still, the omission seems a lack. Fourth, Snare is occasionally too terse and unforthcoming: there are remarks which read a bit like a lecturer's asides to a knowing audience (for example pages 48 and 173), and some ideas or theories (for example the prisoners' dilemma on page 170, and non-natural properties on page 166) get mentions bereft of elucidation. Nevertheless, I shall be strongly

recommending this book to my own first-year students.

The book cannot be so readily recommended to that other kind of student, the interested general reader uncushioned by an environment of institutionalised teaching of the subject. In particular, the occasional terseness may present difficulties for such a reader. What illumination would she or he get, for instance, from the following criticism (I quote it in its entirety) of the existentialist idea of an existential, self-creating choice of values: 'This is a bit mysterious' (page 157). Such undeveloped passages may, however, be a consequence of a sad fact: the author was still working on the manuscript when he died of cancer at the age of 47, and revisions were completed and the book seen through the press by colleagues.

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Moral luck in medical ethics and practical politics

Donna Dickenson, Aldershot, Avebury, 1991, 153 pages, £30.00

Problems of moral luck arise primarily from our tendencies, on the one hand, to hold agents responsible to a degree which depends at least partly on the outcomes of their decisions or actions (the killer drunken driver is more culpable than the non-killer), and, on the other, not to hold agents responsible for what is beyond their control.

The debate over moral luck in recent times was set in motion by a famous exchange between Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel in 1976. In this book, Donna Dickenson takes that debate, which we might say has been carried on primarily at the level of theoretical ethics, and uses it to shed light on some practical issues in medical and political ethics. As she hopes, her practical discussions also help to elucidate certain theoretical matters.

The first three chapters outline the debate between Williams and Nagel, and investigate moral luck in Kantian and consequentialist ethics. Dickenson argues that Martha Nussbaum's critique of Kant in her book *The Fragility of Goodness* is unjustified: Kant does make room for moral risk