

Legalization, and finally John Keown reflects upon the Dutch experience, concluding that the legal and medical criteria for in Holland 'would not appear to constitute an effective safeguard against the practice of non-voluntary and involuntary euthanasia'.

Overall this volume is a valuable contribution to the debate about euthanasia. Both the 1982 report and the 1993 submission contain powerful arguments against legalising euthanasia and, whilst representing a particular perspective, are valuable resources for all who seek to inform themselves on this controversial and important issue.

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Advance directives and the pursuit of death with dignity

Norman L Cantor, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, 209 pages, £22.50

This book, by a distinguished American lawyer, is a welcome addition to the growing literature on end-of-life issues. At one level it is a well-articulated polemic for its author's convictions: the desirability of written advance instructions about one's wishes, coupled with the appointment of an agent to interpret them and ensure their implementation. Although we are told that in a pluralistic society there are almost no moral precepts, Cantor's essay is an exploration and defence of 'prospective autonomy'. This, at least, a pluralistic society should, he thinks, accept. But it would be unfair to represent his book as a campaign for it is also a wideranging survey of legal, moral and practical

issues. As such, it deserves to be read by anyone with an interest in terminal care.

Cantor sees the best legal realisation of his convictions in the Advance Directives for Health Care Act (1991) adopted in New Jersey. Accordingly, a chapter is devoted to this legislation and the New Jersey Bioethics Commission's Combined Health Advance Directive (AD) is printed as one of the valuable appendices. Individual documents are likely to have a low take-up and the case is argued for a standard format. Even here he concedes that the problems arising from a conflict of the incompetent patient's contemporaneous well-being and the advance instructions cannot be definitely resolved. His fear is that unless such legislation can be made to work pressure for euthanasia and assisted suicide will increase – perhaps a bad thing, although he never actually says so.

The difficulty with all this, as he concedes, is the reluctance most of us have to confront our own mortality. How many readers of this review have written an AD? Even in the USA, the *best* estimates are 5–25 per cent, mostly in inadequate short-form formats. The AD is likely to remain a minority interest and even if its operation were problem-free, it is hard to see how it would prevent 'reliance from prior general interactions' that seem to Cantor 'quite unsound'. If an AD is really necessary to secure 'a modicum of dignity in the dying process', the prospects for many of us are unappealing. But is it necessary? The link made in the book's title needs a fuller exploration.

The differences between states and between state and federal law become apparent early in the book, illustrated by the Cruzan case. Cantor goes on to discuss statutory frameworks, their drafting and interpretation. He suggests that a health care provider should, and could, be compelled to violate his or her conscience where

alternative arrangements to accommodate the patient could not be made. This is highlighted in his resolution of five scenarios. If the doctors won't implement the AD, why not 'sue them to hell'? To this we have the lame reply that litigation would probably be expensive, exhausting and frustrating. I thought this a weakness. In his highly individualistic emphasis on autonomy, Cantor fails to explore adequately the effects of one person's decisions on others. Families and doctors have their own moral positions that may go beyond an emotional inability to cope with prospective death or 'good medical practice'. Nurses in particular often express strong views about withdrawal of nutrition. This deserves a fuller moral analysis than we are offered. But these are minor points. Cantor writes clearly and avoids excessive repetition. I warmly recommend his book.

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