

Book reviews

The ethics of IVF

Anthony Dyson, London, Mowbray, 1995, 132 pages, £9.99 sc.

Professor Dyson was a member of the Warnock Committee on Human Fertilisation and Embryology. His book is published in a series designed to promote Christian reflection on ethical dilemmas in 'an increasingly scientifically dominated society'. The book has, therefore, two areas of competence: the practice of *in vitro* fertilisation and its attendant techniques; and reflections on what specifically Christian thinking can contribute to an ethics of the practice.

In the first area the history and methods of donor insemination and IVF are written simply and with sufficient clarity for the readers addressed. Emotional impacts at each stage of the process are brought out in biographical case histories. All persons involved in the transaction are treated as moral agents, each with responsibilities. In the history of embryo research the subjective experience of quickening is erroneously identified with Aristotle's philosophical concept of animation; thus used, animation referred, not to 'the entry of the soul' but to the recognition of a rational being. Into the social evaluation of research and practice are brought the usual cupboard-full of skeletal fears: risk, rhetorical and commercial exploitation, male dominance and use of women, and the rest. Regulation in Britain by the HFEA is rightly praised.

The book is distinguished from other such by Dyson's competence as a theologian; he discusses what his discipline can contribute to the ethics of the practice. He registers dismay at the misuse of the Bible, and at absolutist recitations of theological principle as determinants of Christian ethics. Only in engagement with the relevant empirical features can theology play any part at all. Dyson roots this theology in the centrality of Christ

'in his person, teaching, agency, death and resurrection'. In the end he derives from this an ethics of responsibility, in terms of which he can attribute duties to the agents involved in the practice. But how clear and strong are the links between this 'centrality' and his prescription? How far does it take him? He takes no comfort from the crude natural law tradition as he states it: the only indication of the post-Vatican II reform of that tradition occurs, as if by accident, at the end of a quotation from Schillebeeckx. He goes some way with Flynn and Simmons, writers in the USA in 1984 and 1983; but both are declared vulnerable; they do not, in fact, start from where he is. He may find, as others of us have found who have reflected a little on these things, that he can go on further without the Greeks, who were baptised into Christian morality by St Paul in Romans 1 and 2 (the 'Gentile conscience'), and confirmed by St Thomas Aquinas, out of a recovered Aristotle, in the thirteenth century. Theology offers no substitute, among rational beings, for moral reasoning.

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Ethics, law and nursing

Nina Fletcher, Janet Holt, Margaret Brazier and John Harris, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995, 225 pages, £40.00 hc, £14.95 sc.

This book will be extremely useful for both student nurses and qualified practitioners who are looking for an easy-to-read but nevertheless substantial introduction to health care ethics and the law. The authors must be congratulated on producing such a comprehensive account within limited

word space, in a way that remains consistently stimulating to the reader. The judicious use of lively examples facilitates this, as does the decision not to break up the text with endless references. Despite the plurality of authors, the style remains consistent and the integration of legal and ethical perspectives offers the reader the possibility of continuous comparisons between the two. The language used is clear and straightforward with a refreshing absence of 'jargon' and the frequent references to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) Code of Professional Conduct 1992 (and related publications) underline the importance and relevance of the issues under discussion. One particularly good section of the book is chapter two, which manages to introduce ethical theory in a very accessible yet non-trivial way.

Inevitably, in a book of this kind there will be limitations. The brief section on 'ethics and culture' (pages 5-6) is really too brief in my view and the complexity of the matter, which is of great interest to nurses working within ethnic minority communities, is inadequately dealt with. It is not I think useful to dismiss 'moral relativism' so easily. Similarly, the section on Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs) makes no mention of some of the philosophical objections to the whole idea of measurability that QALYs and other similar approaches trade on. It would have been fruitful to have raised such issues even if they could not have been fully explored. To state 'Used in this way [ie deciding amongst a range of treatments which will most benefit a particular patient] QALYs can be a useful and ethical way of deciding which treatment may be best for an individual ...' (page 96) is suggestive of dogma. This, to my mind, goes against the general spirit of the book, which attempts to generate thoughtful questions rather than neat answers.

In like vein, I found the coverage of the advocacy role (pages 112–113, 169–170) disappointing since hefty objections to it do exist in the nursing literature. In addition, the consideration of the pros and cons of advance directives (pages 220–221) could be criticised for a legal bias with the moral (and underpinning philosophical) difficulties disappearing from view. Generally though, the balance between the legal and moral commentary is well sustained. Indeed, the above remarks turn out to be rather minor objections to what I consider to be a most informative and readable book for nurses.

It should be noted that the accuracy of the legal material in the book and the credibility of the legal opinions expressed have to be taken on trust as the reviewer has no legal expertise.

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Ethical foundations of health care. Responsibilities in decision making

Jane Singleton and Susan McLaren,
London, Mosby, 1995, 202 pages,
£9.95 pb.

This book provides a useful addition to existing texts for health professionals on ethical theory and contemporary health care dilemmas. The greatest strength of the book is its careful structure, which makes it ideally suited to becoming a reference text for student and teacher alike.

Written jointly by a philosopher and a nurse the book enjoys the strength of both perspectives. The volume is divided into two sections. The first explores philosophical frameworks in some detail and the second examines contemporary health care dilemmas.

As might be expected, consequentialist and deontological theories are introduced and the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice discussed in the first part of the book. The debate benefits from quotations from primary sources, allowing the reader to capture something of the flavour of the original. The exposition is clear but will take the reader beyond mere introduction to address some complex issues of interest.

The second part of the book reviews questions of life and death, confidentiality, informed consent, truth-telling and health care research. In addition there are some wideranging discussions of contemporary relevance such as access to health care, professional codes of conduct and consumer perspectives. One disappointing omission from the text is any discussion of the ethical issues raised by health promotion. With the exception of a brief reference to paternalism in primary prevention this burgeoning area was left largely unexplored. Given the current emphasis upon health promotion in many curricula for health professionals, including Project 2000 for nursing students, this oversight will need addressing in future editions.

Each chapter of the book begins with some learning outcomes which usefully focus the mind. Clear headings and subheadings enhance the book's value as a teaching tool, as does the numbering system which facilitates cross-referral. Each chapter similarly concludes with some learning exercises, many of which would translate directly into discussion topics or assignment titles for students. In addition there are some useful further reading lists and a summary of key points. The book concludes with some well chosen appendices, including the professional codes or rules for physiotherapists, occupational therapists and nurses.

Two chapters stand out as being of particular value: chapter three, which addresses the question of what critical ethics can achieve and chapter eight where this is re-visited, with a case study of euthanasia. These will be of particular use with enquiring students who may question the value of the whole critical ethics 'enterprise'.

Ethical Foundations of Health Care merits a place in the library of undergraduate and postgraduate students of health care who have an interest in ethics and who seek a well constructed guide to the subject.

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The family in the age of biotechnology

Edited by Carole Ulanowski,
Aldershot, Avebury, 1995, 161 pages,
£32.50 hc.

There is, no doubt, something to be said for philosophy applied to practical affairs, provided that the philosophy be good and that the issues be worth addressing and credibly addressed. Neither qualification is evident everywhere in this collection of papers read at a conference of the Society for Applied Philosophy. Indeed the chapter closest to reality was written, not out of the literature of adversarial ideology, but out of the experience of a social worker with children assigned to foster or adopting parents by order of a court. The papers are exercises in social theorizing; they do not address the ethics of medical practice.

The papers fall roughly into three groups. The first speculates on concepts of family relationship arising from assisted reproduction technology (ART), as regulated, in Britain, by the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority. (Editors should get their facts right: the HFEA was established under the statute of 1990, not in the 1980s, when regulation was undertaken by the Voluntary (Interim) Licensing Authority.) Almond, in conscious difference from most other contributors, defends family bonds as the cement of social existence, not subject to construction and destruction by fragile and volatile individual choice. Legal and social acceptance of the 'fractionalization' now read into families formed by ART should await experience and reflection on it. Cole has his own view of the legal controls for ART already in place: they purport to protect the welfare of children; in fact their aim is reactionary, to protect the traditional or 'moral' family and to preserve the privileged and powerful position of men within it.

The second group of chapters meets the Editor's call for 'reflective space' on the family. Thomasson would prefer 'a non-biological ectogenic form of parenting' to nurture in a biological unit. In such a 'networked' family the wise child would not want to know her father; it won't matter. Leighton, with his social worker's knowledge of children, would differ: children, in order to develop their sense of self, need an identifiable human beginning and a family relationally based on integrity, trust and openness. There is no place for the pretence that a bio-engineered child is the natural child of its pseudo-parents.

In the third group, on marriage, Wilkinson and Gregory chase the same hare. Wilkinson asks whether