Medical commitments ceremonies

I read Raanan Gillon’s piece on the defence of medical commitments ceremonies with interest. I was, however, disturbed to see that in the declaration of a new doctor considered satisfactory at Imperial College there is no mention of age among the politically correct list of human and social characteristics that should not influence a doctor’s duty of care. The omission is conspicuous in view of the abundant evidence that age discrimination is widely practised in medicine and that it has recently been proscribed in the National Service Framework for Older People.

Does this mean that I must advise all my elderly patients that in any encounters with graduates of Imperial College they must insist on a second opinion?

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Reference
1 Gillon R. In defence of medical commitment ceremonies. Journal of Medical Ethics 2002;28:7–9

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ethics of Genetics in Human Procreation


This is a challenging book that I recommend for anyone who wishes to engage with contemporary philosophical discussions relating to assisted reproduction, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) and embryo research. It consists of six principal papers, each accompanied by responses from two discussants. There is also, in an appendix, a summary of the discussion that followed each of these six sessions in the final symposium of the EU-funded European Network for Bio-medical Ethics held in Sheffield in 1999. In addition, there is a seventh paper in which the network, funded from 1996–1999, is evaluated, and there are introductory and closing remarks to the volume by Dietmar Mieth, Professor of Social Ethics at Tübingen.

In his introductory contribution, Professor Mieth asks us to consider the words that are used to describe the practices of IVF and PGD and the problems they generate. He follows Illich in problematising the word “life”, tracing its use over the past two centuries in the context of our mechanistic biology and society’s view of individuals. He argues that the terms of the “official” moral debates in this area—the terminology of bioethics as well as the terms of reference of the learned bodies and committees—have pre-empted these deliberations so that they can only lead to the fully liberal, permissive position.

In the first major paper, Sheila McLean discusses the “right” to procreation. What does this amount to? When may obligations to a future child restrict or potentially infringe upon parental freedom to make specific decisions? And when can individual wishes be challenged in the interests of society—the wider community?

In the responses to this paper, Anders Norberg sets out a coherent position in which there can be limited, local, contractarian rights to fertility treatments and a limited autonomy on the use of prenatal diagnosis and decisions about selective terminations of pregnancy. Onora O’Neill applies the concept of the “good enough” parent to the realm of assisted reproduction, and asks how the new ways of becoming parents may lead to new ways of being parents. She asks us to examine the ethical issues in this area from the perspective of children born as a consequence of the new technologies. She emphasises the differences between that perspective and that of the perspectives of children who have been adopted or fostered. An increase in choice for adults may lead children to feel rejected by their genetic or gestational parents. Chosen relationships are often understood as very different from given relationships, and more easily become conditional. How may this alter parent-child relationships? Notions of autonomy, it is argued, should not be the only or central concern in regulating this area. Finally, Walter Lesch discusses the question of when parents or children can be considered “good enough” in the genetic sense. He maintains that it is legitimate for the standard of “good enough” to vary, depending upon the biological and social origin of the child.

A similar format applies in the five other sections. Derek Beyleveld presents a technical argument about the status of the embryo and the fetus, starting from the ethical system of Alan Gewirth. I found this unconvincing, as did the two discussants for several reasons, but I am happy to concede that this topic is outside my area of expertise.

The third paper is presented by Jean-Pierre Wils. Autonomy, it is argued, only makes sense in the context of a relationship in which the other is recognised as a(nother) moral agent. Accordingly, the difficulty in achieving this in relation to an embryo or fetus makes it difficult to treat the embryo with full respect, and technological modes of visualising the embryo or fetus can make this even more difficult. Our habits of perception pre-empt our ability to choose how to understand what we see. Wils argues for a graded recognition of (active) personhood or (passive) moral rights. In the discussions, Engel emphasises the danger of determinism and Dierickx discusses the depersonalisation that often accompanies prenatal screening programmes at the population level and the altered notion of responsi-

bility (for the genetic health of one's children) that nature need not simply take its course.

The fourth paper, by Regine Kollek, locates the new reproductive technologies within modernity—and therefore within the paradoxical conjunction of both increased freedom and heightened accountability for one’s “free” choices. The notion of risk management is crucial to this paradox, and Kollek discusses the impact this has on women’s lives. The ways in which the new reproductive technologies can reinforce the emphasis on genetic identity—one’s “true” family consisting of one’s molecular relations—is also discussed. And Kollek echoes Mieth’s criticism of bioethics as a mechanism that controls and silences opposition to the new reproductotechnologies. The discussants to this paper both challenge Kollek and extend the scope of her argument.

The fifth paper, by Marcus Düvell, is methodological; it considers how to justify an ethi-

cal position in this area. He outlines several of the areas of contention already discussed and proposes a framework within which to consider them. He suggests—and I disagree—that bioethical principles can define what is justified, allowed or forbidden while other considerations (of apparently lesser importance, beyond the scope of ethics) can guide other aspects of behaviour. The discussants criticise this view too, objecting to the narrow scope of applicability of this ethics and the framing of ethical responsibility as (merely) the recognition of justified interests.

The final paper, by Beyleveld and Pattinson, examines the legal frameworks within which various European countries tackle IVF, PGD, cloning, and related technologies. The substantial differences are accounted for in several ways, including messy political compromise, and the nation-specific meshwork of legislation and non-legislative regulation, professional codes of practice etc—as discussed further in a commentary. The other discussants examine the specifically medical aspects of fertility treatment.

This is a wide ranging volume that examines reproductotechnology and reproductogenetics from several, conflicting perspectives. The resulting compilation is especially valuable for bringing

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The editors will decide as before whether to also publish it in a future paper issue.
strands of Continental philosophy, with a heavy representation—especially from Tübingen, into dialogue with a more Anglo-Saxon bioethics. This breadth of perspective is uncommon, impressive, and very helpful. I hope that further contributions of this sort emerge from future collaborative projects in Europe.

The Concise Encyclopedia of the Ethical Assessment of New Technologies


Whilst offering extensive new opportunities, technological developments also tend to pose serious challenges and difficult ethical questions. Developments in—for example, biotechnology, transport technology, and nuclear technology have for decades been the subject of intense public debate and a principal object for philosophical reflection and ethical analysis. The Concise Encyclopedia of the Ethical Assessment of New Technologies is a collection of articles, thoughtfully edited by Ruth Chadwick, which addresses a range of the ethical issues pertaining to contemporary technology.

The editor’s objective in this collection appears to be to describe general methodological issues in ethical analysis and to give an account of the practical application of ethical theory to issues surrounding new technologies. Some of the articles provide an outline of conceptual frameworks for ethical analysis and key ethical principles—for example, discussion of consequential and deontological perspectives, the precautionary principle, and slippery slope arguments. Other articles go beyond these methodological issues and apply ethical terminology to specific technologies such as genetics, computers, nuclear technology, and reproductive technology.

The collected articles all have a standardised and easily accessible layout and are arranged in a single alphabetical list by topic. This confirms what is already suggested in the book’s title, namely that the encyclopedia is a scholarly reference work. The main body of each article follows a short outline section, including a preview of headings, a glossary of essential concepts, and a brief introductory paragraph defining the debated issues and summarising the content. A short bibliography completes each article.

The encyclopedia provides a detailed first introduction to a number of new methodologies and the ethical issues pertaining to them. The very helpful introductory paragraphs make it easy for the reader to focus on essential themes and the glossary makes it possible to keep track of sometimes quite complex technical and philosophical issues. Most articles are easy to read and the authors succeed in giving a nuanced account of often quite controversial issues. However, the limited space available makes it difficult for the articles to be more than good and thorough introductions. An extended bibliography, consisting of suggestions for further reading, could make the encyclopedia an even better work of reference.

Naturally a collection of articles on a very broad subject such as new technologies will have to depend on a cautious selection among a large number of relevant and important topics. It seems the articles for this collection have been selected with some preference for biotechnology and medical technology, and although the book to some extent also addresses the impact of other technologies it leaves the impression that ethical questions relating to bio/medical technologies are particularly numerous and significant. The distinct focus adopted in the selection of articles suggests that this is a work aimed mainly at an audience specifically interested in biotechnology and medical ethics.

In sum, The Concise Encyclopedia of the Ethical Assessment of New Technologies impresses as a highly applicable reference work, particularly for readers with an interest in biotechnology, medical technology, and medical ethics. The book is easy to use for reference but also serves to bring attention to important new issues and emphasises the need to develop the conceptual basis for analysis as new technologies emerge. For that reason it is likely to become essential reading for ethicists, medical students, scientists, and others working with the ethical implications of technology.

Legal and Ethical Aspects of Organ Transplantation


Some lawyers, even some academic lawyers, have developed the happy knack of being in the right place at the right time, without being ambulance drivers. David Price, with not only a timely but a thoughtful and thought provoking examination of organ transplantation and associated questions of commerce and commodity in body parts, seems almost prescient. Did he know, when he set out to compose what has emerged as his elegant and authoritative account and critique, that bodies and body parts were about to become one of the most controversial intellectual properties for years?

Price’s corpus is in three parts; predictably cadaveric organ transplantation and living donors comprise the most substantial elements of his exegesis and critique. While his review largely antedates cell nucleus substitution and the potential therapeutic application of stem cell research, he recognises that this is one of a number of “alternatives” to current transplant technologies that will later require more comprehensive consideration and review. In a third, concluding section, he addresses the troubling issue of “commerce” and the troublesome one of “recipients”. Throughout, his analysis and arguments are driven by the need—as he perceives and defends it—to respond to “medical globalisation”. This entails setting in place an integrated, coherent, and global conception of appropriate modes of transplant practice, and a similarly fashioned and dedicated form of regulation.

Price attempts to stake out what for him would be a coherent and defensible position on organ transplantation. Although his analysis and arguments may be of global reach and appeal while yet remaining sensitive to culturally and politically diverse circumstances. As others have concluded, this is no mean task, and yet the attempt is an important and urgent one. Too often, in the absence of some agreed alternative framework for international approaches to modern scientific biomedicine the contemporary default mechanism of market regulation succeeds. Here, Price is shy neither of introducing nor courting controversy. He engages with commerce (it is “too dismissive to simply sideline at least consideration of commercial schemes”), marries doubt about the whole-hearted value of intuitionism—(too long worn out in public controversy in transplant policy), with an appeal to relativity (“philosophical choice in a specific cultural milieu”), but would divorce the views of potential donors from those of their relatives, and bring an apparently autonomous and enhancing preference for doing as the former (would have) wished, to what the latter would have done.

Price concludes that developed countries which do not facilitate an increase in organs available for transplantation purposes encourage the development of an alternative trade in organs. Thus, exploration of supranational responses to need and regulation are necessary to protect and promote donors, recipients, and health care professionals, while yet encouraging donation and increasing the supply of transplantable organs. One of the keys to unlocking this response is a strong slice of autonomy—so that the premises of potential donors are neither frustrated nor assumed—and another is a mild draught of commercialisation. Failing this, Price would advocate a system of mandatory choice and adherence to those choices even when they would encompass presently legally dubious practices—such as elective ventilation.

This is a comprehensive and considered book on legal approaches to organ transplantation, which, as far as lawyers have been concerned, has been strangely lacking as a companion to a number of excellent studies of the philosophy and ethics of the subject. But Price engages also in those ethical debates and arguments, and compared with many who have surveyed other discrete areas of modern biomedical practice has done so from a broad international perspective; there is, (as one example) more in this essay from the rich and vibrant traditions of South America than in many comparable volumes. This is a particularly welcome addition to the emergent library of international biomedical ethics and comparative law.

Transplantation Ethics


Transplantation Ethics is a book that will be welcomed by teachers and students of medical ethics as well as health care professionals and policy makers involved in transplantation issues. The book provides a broad overview of recent and contemporary debates relating to organ transplantation, while also defending particular methods of approaching the ethical questions and using them to argue for particular policy proposals. Most of the book’s chapters are based on previously published materials, and while this loss of repetition, the overall result is coherent and highly readable.

The book is divided into three parts. The first addresses the definition of death, a matter which is clearly of great importance for
transplantation ethics, given the rule that vital organs may only be removed form a corpse, but on which opinions are highly divergent. Veach reviews the debates surrounding the shift from cardiorespiratory to brain-oriented definitions of death, but argues that the currently favoured whole-brain approach is an unstable compromise, subject to the same kinds of objection that its advocates level against the traditional cardiorespiratory accounts. The whole-brain definition should therefore be abandoned in favour of a higher-brain-oriented concept which acknowledges that a person is dead—and that “death behaviours” such as mourning and the like—only when they are appropriate—that is, he or she has permanently lost the capacity for consciousness. Recognising, however, that this is not an issue where consensus can be expected, Veach proposes a “conscience clause”, according to which individuals would have the right to choose, from a range of alternatives including traditional, whole-brain, and higher-brain accounts, which definition of death is applicable in their own case. This is an interesting idea, though one wonders whether it would not better be formulated as a right to select the conditions under which lifesaving treatment may be ceased and organ procure- ment initiated, independently of the determin- ination of death.

The second part of the book deals with organ procurement. Here Veach focuses on the question of “privileged donors”. He argues that the currently favoured whole-brain definition of death, like all others, poses serious difficulties for the point of view of the donor. Thus, for example, organs, such as HIV positive organs, and xenografts. It is here that the underpinning moral theory becomes apparent. Veach defends the approach of each case is analysed and

Overall, Transplantation Ethics is a valuable contribution to the field. It is accessible to non-specialists while providing a thorough treatment of the issues and a high standard of argument. Although the book has a strong US orientation in its discussion of law and policy issues, this does not detract from its interest or relevance to readers elsewhere.

This is a compact, nicely written book that provides a rejuvenating alternative to the utilitarian orthodoxy that dominates contem- porary bioethics. There is currently a dearth of bioethical literature presenting what might be called a more traditional approach to medi- cine and health care. This contribution is a short and useful introduction to such an approach.

The book announces itself as being written with “both the general reader and students and professionals in medicine, nursing, law, philosophy and related areas in mind”. Accordingly, it assumes no prior knowledge of ethics. It gives a neat introductory overview of some ethical concerns raised by reproduction, death, and dying. The issues considered include euthanasia and withdrawal of treat- ment, the persistent vegetative state, abortion, cloning, and in vitro fertilisation. By beginning the early chapters with a

Chapter 3 is followed by brief explorations of the controversial topics of abortion and embryo destruction. The final chapter looks at the question of the moral status of children. For many, this raises serious concerns about the social significance of tube feeding. The case discussed in this chapter, the

Transplantation Ethics: A Short Introduction

This is one thing to say that the doctor may decide not to intervene—for example, on the grounds that he wants to respect the parents’ wishes: it is quite another to say that it is entirely impermissible to perform life-saving treatment on one twin (even where the parents wish it), in the same way as it is impermissible for the Nazi doctor to use one patient as a sacrifice for experimentation. In the case of the conjoined twins, “Jodie” and “Mary”.

Watt’s own account, sometimes omissions to act to save a patient can be wrongful. And one begins to wonder whether the requirement that a doctor refrain, on moral grounds, from treat- ment either of the patients destined for certain imminent death is not moral reasoning gone awry.
Although I am glad to see women's rights taken seriously as human rights in this book, I have some doubts about the wisdom of concentrating women's issues largely in one chapter, comprehensive though it is (with material on violence against women, enforced sterilisation and abortion, "honour" killing, rape in wartime, and female genital mutilation). There are other ways in which women are exploited by or with the complicity of doctors—particularly in commodification of gamete donation, which will be especially worrisome in light of the need for enucleated eggs in the stem cell technologies. It was disappointing not to see much mention of the disproportionate structural adjustment policies and debt payments impose on women's health in the otherwise excellent chapter on health as a human rights objective. The Medical Profession and Human Rights is nevertheless a very important book: testimony to the need for the British Medical Association to continue using its unique position at the hub of Commonwealth and other international medical professional bodies, in order to bring to public and professional attention wider ethical issues than the everyday nitte-gritty of consent and confidentiality. This is a book for dipping, rather than reading at one sitting, not least because few of us can stand the sustained grimness of much of what has to be reported. Busy practitioners might want to begin at the end, with the succinct, clear-headed and hard-hitting summary of all the book's recommendations, and work back from there to the individual topical chapters in which the recommendations first appear. I hope that teachers of medical ethics—and more broadly, anyone who has a role in training health care professionals—will work from there to the individual topical chapters explicating the four principles are still the same. This also means that the restrictive limits in the scope of the principles of beneficence and justice are still open to the same criticisms that were levelled against the previous editions of the book. For the person who already has the 4th edition on the bookshelf, and who is not actively using the book for teaching or study there is thus little reason to buy the 5th edition although it is very modestly priced. The underlying arguments have changed to some extent, but the conclusions are pretty much the same.

**Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 5th edn.**


The Principles of Biomedical Ethics by Beauchamp and Childress is a classic in the field of medical ethics. The first edition was published in 1979 and “unleashed” the four principles of respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice on the newly emerging field. These are the core principles which form the basis of all ethical discussion. The four principles are widely accepted and are divided into two main parts: one “On caring for patients” and part two “On becoming a ‘team player’: searching for esprit de corps and conflicts of socialization”. This is a convenient way to think about medical ethics. Edward Jenner was born on 17 April 1749 and died on 17 November 1823. He was an English scientist and medical practitioner who is credited with the discovery of smallpox vaccine.
Part one covers the ethical dilemmas of doctors caring for patients and the many practical problems that arise; this area of medical ethics is what most doctors would consider to be “true” medical ethics. Many doctors would not consider part two to be medical ethics at all, because once a person has fully undergone the process of becoming a medical professional they can lose sight of the ethics involved in professional interactions. This is not to say this area of medical ethics is not important, indeed, it is extremely important but is not often considered by doctors in their everyday practice. The medical student, however, is in a better position to evaluate the ethical problems arising in training and staff interaction because they have not yet fully undergone medical socialisation.

Each of the two main parts is further subdivided into sections. The first section of part one is performing procedures. This covers informed consent; the person performing the procedures when inexperienced; blaming the patient for your own shortcomings; doctor-patient confidentiality; the newly dead and their rights, and peer and senior support in cases of disciplinary action. The format within each subsection is identical throughout the book. One to five clinical cases are briefly described that will be instantly identifiable to any medical student or doctor. Two commentaries then follow, written by different contributors. These commentaries are in general well thought out, logically argued, and pitched so that someone with little or no prior exposure to medical ethics will be able to follow, written by different contributors. They tend to contradict one another in parts, which is one of the books strongest attributes in that it shows medical ethics to be a subject where debate is encouraged rather than a discipline where a prescriptive set of rules holds sway. Concluding each section is a set of thought-provoking discussion questions. The book’s other sections of part one are: (a) problems in truth-telling, which covers issues such as admitting mistakes to patients and omitting to tell patients salient facts and (b) setting boundaries, which explores doctor-patient professional boundaries, treating patients you don’t like, and the limits of a doctor’s compassion.

The second section of the book covers all aspects of professional behaviour, including: abuse (psychological, physical, and sexual); professional communication (jargon and humour); questioning authority and the status quo; alcohol and drug abuse; mistreating patients; covering up, and misrepresented research. These issues are rarely covered in medical education and it is to be hoped that through this book their profile will be raised in mainstream medical education. The second section is as equally well written as the first and the authors communicate their points well.

I think this book would make an excellent basis for a course in medical ethics for medical students. The course could be taught as a continuous module or a number of planned sessions throughout an academic year. Ward Ethics is also very suitable for trainee doctors, if not all doctors, and I would recommend it to anyone with the slightest interest in medical ethics.

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Bioethics in social context


Hoffmaster endeavours to enrich the dominant bioethical paradigm, based on abstract principles, with the lived experience of moral decision making. He proposes that bioethics involves not only the justifications for moral judgments, but also the understanding of the beliefs and values underpinning them. The old“”concepts“”of morality are replaced by a new “reoriented“ bioethics, situated in the untidy world of “lived human experience”. In other words, context, in its widest sense, is to be integrated into the bioethical framework.

The relevance of social context in moral philosophy is not new, however. As MacIntyre tells us in After Virtue: “it also follows that we have not understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be”. He reminds us that Plato and Aristotle, amongst others, undertook this project. MacIntyre, like Hoffmaster, laments the loss of social embodiment in the “narrow conception“ of contemporary moral philosophy. I submit that we are now witnessing the rejection of Cartesian duality and the replacement, of an old paradigm—reintegrating the social milieu, narrative, and the emotions, in our conceptualisation of moral philosophy.

Hoffmaster’s second goal is to raise the profile of social ethics within the field of bioethics. He argues that the distinction between descriptive and normative ethics is artificial, and that the former is unfairly devalued. Together with an editorial in this journal two years ago, somewhat tentatively suggests that “a more systematic approach to the empirical base might lead to new issues and new perspectives” for medical ethics. He describes ethical medical decisions as the parent of empirical medical ethics. Hoffmaster, I suspect, would disagree, and would argue that they are both equal and complementary parts of medical ethics.

Does this book achieve these stated aims? The authors certainly do provide us with diverse perspectives, showing us how the social environment and dominant moral norms can shape moral attitudes and decisions. The related valuable work of English social scientists is notably absent—for example, Paul Atkinson’s work on training doctors, and Priscilla Alderson’s ethnographic studies of children and their parents in hospitals. Nor does it read as a coherent, integrated account, as the chapters lack a clearly identifiable common thread.

Sharon Kaufman’s clinical narratives in the practice of geriatric practice provide us with a rich example of the complexity of “clinico-moral“ decision making. She illustrates, with case examples, the power of the “technological imperative” in framing and constraining decisions in the care of frail and sick elderly persons—many of whom may be harmed by medical intervention. She also shows how decision making evolves, and may not even be perceived as a series of steps of making choices, but as part of routine practice.

Margaret Lock’s ethnographic study in Japan sheds light on attitudes and practices towards the dead—in particular the definition of brain death and the recently decided case for organ donation. The resistance in Japan to equating brain death with human death is not, she believes, simply due to cultural and religious influences, but is also linked to the dominant normative belief that the dying person anchored in kinship. The self is relational, and not individuated and atomised as in the West, with death viewed as an evolving process in which the family participates. Despite the lack of a significant cultural divide in attitudes towards death and afterlife, Lock proposes that there are few socially sanctioned channels in the USA—in contrast to Japan—for articulating concerns and disagreement.

Sydney Halpern interprets the changing attitudes and public discourse towards human experimentation as arising from a shift in emphasis from the collective good to the protection of individual rights. Moral judgments, he argues, are contingent upon the social and cultural environment of the time.

Peter Conrad’s chapter on the media, genetics, and culture demonstrates the potential for over-representation and distortion of medical discoveries in the lay press. He argues that genetic optimism—the naïve positivist belief that we will find the basis for human behaviour in our genes, and be able to root out antisocial behaviour by genetic manipulation—can be equated with the fallacy of the “magic bullet” in therapeutics. He concludes that geneticisation reflects the current medical theory of blaming diseases rather than deficiencies and inequities in the social system. I would argue that genetic fatalism can also absolve individuals from moral responsibility, and allow them to blame their children’s illnesses on a genetic cause, so that they eschew reform and redress.

Beeson and Doksum, in contrast, explore how and why individuals reject genetic testing, underscoring the enduring themes of romantic love and family values.

Anspach and Beeson argue that bioethics discourse has neglected the emotions, and describe in detail their role in shaping values and practices in medical decisions. Their chapter on the interplay between emotions and power. They describe “moral dissonance“ as the conflict between emotions and morals, and how its resolution can lead to expansion of moral decisions. Health professionals need to be able to move freely between emotional engagement and detachment, so that they can embody both fairness and imaginative sympathy towards their patients. Interest in the role of the emotions in medical life has developed in many quarters: neuroscience (notably Antonio Damasio); psychology (Daniel Goleman, amongst others); cognitive science (for example, Mark Johnson); and contemporary moral philosophy (Peter Goldie, Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Michael Stocker, and Bernard Williams, to name a few). Modern philosophers are building on the earlier work of Aristotle.

Cate McArdlan’s ethnographic study of clinical ethics committees provides a chastening insight into how they can marginalise front line staff (nurses) and patients themselves. Objectivity, they argue, is two edged, for it can indicate impartiality and fairness, but also objectification and indifference.

Patricia Marshall’s narrative account of working as a clinical ethicist reveals the conflicts and tensions in that role—particularly the compromise of being part of the institution in which the patient is held captive.

Perhaps Charles Bosk’s chapter on the role and moral standing of the social scientist is the most controversial and provocative. He argues that all social science research involves duplicity, the erosion of informed consent, and the violation of confidentiality. The research subject, flattered to be the object of attention, reveals more than originally intended, but relies on the researcher to safeguard these revelations—a trust that is liable to abuse. According to Bosk, the social
scientist’s perspective is ironical, and debunks professional idealism. This debunking, in addition to compromised anonymity, can particularly damage high status professionals. Finally, he argues that there is role-based incompatibility between doing ethics and doing ethnography. Hoffmaster counters these arguments, but cannot entirely remove the disquiet. On the other hand, at least some social scientists appear to demonstrate a profound respect and sympathy towards their research subjects—for example, Rayna Rapp’s work with pregnant women and genetic counsellors.

In conclusion, this book provides a valuable contribution to the expanding field of empirically based ethics, or “ethics in use”, revealing the moral decisions people make in the real world, and how and why they make those decisions.

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Ethics Committees in Central and Eastern Europe

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The growth of research ethics committees worldwide is now fairly rapid and new “markets” for research ethics are opening all the time. The market metaphor is appropriate, since a good deal of the impetus for research ethics review comes from the development of new pharmaceutical products, the globalisation of pharmaceutical research, development and marketing, and the internationalisation of regulatory standards for pharmaceutical R&D. The need for independent ethical review of research protocols by a committee drawing on a range of professional and lay expertise is established as a moral, a quality-management and a regulatory requirement in many jurisdictions, and internationally in the Declarations of Helsinki, the Council of Europe’s Biomedicine Convention, and the International Committee on Harmonisation’s Tripartite Guideline on Good Clinical Practice.

Central and Eastern Europe have for many years been sites of pharmaceutical R&D, but this has intensified in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1989 and later since that time. These revolutions and this intensification have been followed by liberalised markets in health goods and health care, the opening of the state and university sectors to public-private collaborations and private enterprise, creating a fertile context for clinical trials. In addition, the widespread official or unofficial privatisation of health care has created a new set of ethical problems for health care workers, and the beginnings of clinical ethics committees and education programmes. In many cases those beginnings this builds on foundations laid down in the 1960s and later after, but the creation of new nation states (or reinvention of old ones) and the changes in political culture, have made important differences to the scope and significance of ethical reflection on health care and biomedical research.

This useful volume summarises the experience of many states in Central and Eastern Europe, together with comparative material from some Western states, including the UK, the USA, Germany, and the Netherlands. The volume includes helpful material on the role of the Council of Europe and the Biomedicine Convention, the international and national regulations defining research and clinical ethics committees, and the special local issues relevant in each of the countries. It is based on a conference held in Bratislava in late 2000 under the auspices of the Council of Europe’s Demo droit Ethical Review of Biomedical Research Activity (DEBRA) programme, designed to facilitate the development of research ethics committees in Europe.

In addition to the useful comparative material, a few papers describe historical factors relevant to the development of ethical review in particular countries. For example, several papers describe the changing nature of university bioethics under the various changes in government over the past 30 years, and several papers describe the changing involvement of the pharmaceutical industry in their countries—including the role of “home” companies, as well as multinational pharmaceutical firms. A few papers raise philosophical questions about research, research ethics, and research ethics review—the quality of this is good, and they raise some interesting questions which are not often discussed, for example, should ethics committees pronounce on the substantive ethics of a research programme, or only on the actual work planned? For instance, research into the supposed genetic basis of homosexuality, and what the relationship is between ethical review and political culture (does review depend on some form of “pragmatic tolerance” in society and its institutions)? The strong and longstanding philosophical traditions in Central and Eastern Europe are not widely known in the West, and deserve to be better understood. Too much good work in research ethics assumes that the US/UK model is the ideal to be exported. On the evidence of this volume, the potential for a more reflective research ethics lies as much in Eastern Europe as in the USA or the UK, however different the state of institutional development may be.

This book will be useful to researchers planning projects in the various states in Central and Eastern Europe, to scholars of research ethics and its regulations, and to those working in, or otherwise interested in, the development of health care in the region.

E R Ashcroft

NOTICES

European Integration—Philosophy and Ethics of Health Care

The XVIIth international congress of the European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Healthcare will be held from August 21–23 2003 in Vilnius, Lithuania. Its theme is European Integration—Philosophy and Ethics of Health Care.

Abstracts are invited addressing the following topics: development of medical philosophy and bioethics; institutionalisation of philosophy and ethics in health care; harmonisation of medical research regulations; human rights and health care; solidarity and health care; just health care; the gap between “academic” and “bureaucratic” bioethics; commercialisation in health care; patenting and genetics; genetic health related databases; research and personal data; use of biological materials, and (future) European guidelines in biomedical research. Abstracts (500 words maximum) should reach the organisers on disk or by email before December 1, 2002.

For more information please contact: Prof. Dr Henk ten Have, secretariat ESPMED, Department of Ethics, Philosophy and History of Medicine, University Medical Center, PO Box 9101, 6500 HB Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Fax: 024-340254; from abroad: +31–24–3340254; Email: h.tenhave@efg.kun.nl

Course: Death Without Suffering

An Advanced European Bioethics Course, Death Without Suffering, will be held from 31 January to 2 April 2004 in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Specialists from various countries will discuss ethical issues to do with medically assisted death and palliative care.

Subjects will include: Death, suffering and the concept of palliative care; Death and suffering: ethical perspectives; Ethical issues in pain management in hospice care, and Scientific research in palliative care.

The lecturers will be: D Gracia (Spain), W Dickkers, B Gordijn, H ten Have, D Willems, and Z Zylicz (all from the Netherlands). The language of the course will be English and the price is €295.

For more information please contact: N Steinkamp, University Medical Centre Nijmegen, Dept 232 Ethics, Philosophy and History of Medicine, PO Box 9101, 6500 HB Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Telephone: +31 24 3613520; fax: +31 24 3340254; email: n.steinkamp@efg.kun.nl

Spring conference: Bioethics in a Small World

From April 10 to 12 the Europäische Akademie will organise an international conference on bioethical problems connected to the globalisation process. The conference will include sessions on methodological problems—"Bioethics. A science and its application in politics"; “Culture-dependent ethics”—as well as practical problems such as “Research Ethics”, “Access to essential drugs”, “Patents on biomaterials”, and “GMOs and the world’s nutrition problem”.

Speakers will include Abdallah Daar (Toronto), Weyma Lübbe (Leipzig), Edgar Morcher (Salzburg), Udo Schüklenk (Johannesburg), Carmel Shalev (Tel Hashomer), Joseph Strauss (Munich). For further information contact the scientific organisers: Richard Ashcroft (r.ashcroft@ic.ac.uk) or Felix Thiele (Felix.Thiele@DLR.de).