

ethical. This brings him to euthanasia, where he pertinently points out that this is not a new problem, but that it has only now come to public attention because more people have the opportunity to make a decision on when they wish to end their own life.

Contemporary society also shows signs of demand medicine, looking for perfection, but Ritschl points out that this is contrary to the biblical view of life in which pain and suffering play a part. Christian theology can contribute here by questioning the objective of the 'normal man' and by fighting for the integration of the disabled and the sick into society. Jurgen Hubner then examines the role of Christianity in medicine in more detail and draws our attention to the fact that due to the increased specialisation of medicine and the greater use of technology, there is a risk that Man's emotional needs are being neglected. He maintains that the Sermon on the Mount should be the basis of the Christian's care of the whole Man.

The medical profession's attention is also drawn to the ethical issues involved in their wielding of power. They must not exploit their position, and should not use the excuse of pressure of time in order not to explain to the patient what is happening, thereby maintaining their hold over the latter.

Yet medicine is obviously not just about power relationships, but about healing. Here Amelung draws a parallel between the healing power of God and the healing power of doctors.

The ethical issues in ante-natal scanning are given extensive coverage. The principal difficulty arises from the tension between the rights of the unborn child and the rights of the rest of society. These are discussed at some length, and it is pointed out that no one can ever be 100 per cent certain that a child is badly deformed. Moreover, where is the line to be drawn: who should decide what constitutes an unbearable handicap? Piechowiak interestingly states that whereas in the past doctors were concerned with preventing disease, they are now involved in preventing the birth of ill people. Piechowiak believes that in Christian ethics, human life must always take precedence.

To conclude, Eibach looks at the fraught area of whether or not to inform a patient that he or she is terminally ill. Eibach maintains that if the theological point of view is to be considered, the patient must be presented with the full facts to enable him to decide whether or

not to be treated. If the patient is not informed, he is merely an object of the doctor's power. The report comes to an end with a discussion on ethical norms and makes a call for more debate.

This document portrays the complex issues in medical ethics and sets out the 'evangelische' response. Its principal contribution lies in that it deals lucidly with concrete situations rather than the purely abstract. Therefore, although there is a significant degree of repetition, the main article and those on ante-natal scanning and power relationships deserve attention.

PAULINE A STUART
12 Maitland Park Road
Musselburgh EH21 6DX

The Politics of Mental Handicap

Joanna Ryan with Frank Thomas
Penguin Books, London
£1.75

Handicapped Children in Residential Care: A Study of Policy Failure

Ann Shearer
London, Bedford Square Press,
National Council for Voluntary
Organisations
£4.95

These two books share a common theme: society's blindness to the needs of handicapped people, and its lack of response except to incarcerate the sufferers in segregated institutions. From there on the focus of the authors is different.

Ann Shearer points out that the emphasis of care for handicapped children has been on their handicap, physical or more usually mental, rather than on their needs as children. The 'normal' requirement of nurture within a relationship with a loving adult has been disregarded. She contrasts the facilities offered to children who are placed away from home because of their handicap with those offered to healthy children who are unable to remain with their families. The book starts with a review of the stark findings of the Curtis committee in 1946 regarding children deprived of a normal home life. It charts the gradual change in attitude and provision of services, pointing out that

handicapped children have not benefited from the changes along with the others. This information is teased out from a mass of official reports, statistics, White Papers, legislation and the like. I was glad to have the information in comprehensible form, and feel the book should be required reading for professionals in the field.

The Politics of Mental Handicap, however, has a message for all of us, particularly doctors, and it is not a very pleasant one. Joanna Ryan provides an over-view of the 'difference' that is mental handicap in historical and contemporary contexts. She feels that the mentally handicapped are seen, and thus treated, as a sub-human species, who are only accepted by society if they can mask their deficiency well enough to fit in with the rest of us. Even with the present emphasis on community care she does not see much impetus coming from the general community to adapt to the abilities of the mentally handicapped. She challenges the fairly recently established tradition of medical and nursing care for the mentally handicapped, favouring a more general approach. However, she sees doctors and nurses as being reluctant to give up their power, and I suspect that she is correct.

Frank Thomas's contribution to the book is in the form of extracts from a diary he kept whilst employed for a few months as nursing assistant at a mental handicap hospital. It is enlightening to have an account of the details of life for mentally handicapped people, but I thought this part of the book was on the whole unhelpful. Staff attitudes towards the patients are seen as uniformly abusive and denigrating, except for his own which are sympathetic and caring. We know about the atrocities in some hospitals from numerous reports in recent years. It is true that to walk into a mental handicap hospital is in some cases to enter a world one thought had disappeared with the Victorian era. However, as Joanna Ryan points out, to castigate individual nurses for this is only too easy, they are as much victims of the system as perpetrators. She challenges our collusion in writing off mentally handicapped people, and thus providing them with facilities that would not be acceptable for ourselves. One can question the balance of the book, but perhaps its value lies in posing questions rather than answering them.

DR JENNY CRICKMAY
2 Garfield Place
Maudlin Road
Totnes, Devon