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Book Reviews

Science, Ethics and Medicine

H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Daniel Callahan, Editors

Hastings-on-Hudson: The Hastings Center, Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, N. Y. 1976. xxvi + 274 pp., \$4.95 (paper).

This is the first of a projected series of four volumes, dealing with the general theme "The Foundations of Ethics and Its Relationship to Science." The book is a collection of nine essays, followed by eight critical commentaries. An introductory chapter indicates how the essays are interrelated. Although not part of this series of discussions and resulting essays, the volume also includes a survey of the field of bioethics today. The contributors are drawn from medicine, philosophy, biology, history of medicine, and sociology. Their ethical agreement is no greater than that of society at large.

The purpose of the work as a whole is threefold: to ask about the origin and validity of our moral assumptions, to see the way in which ethics and science have mutually influenced each other, to move away from practical problems of decision-making to some of the larger theoretical issues, which ultimately form the basis of our decisions. The essays in this volume focus largely on medicine, because it was thought to be especially revelatory of our conceptual presuppositions and value-judgments and how these interact with the scientific world.

Like so many other collections of essays, which are the fruit of interdisciplinary, scholarly discussions, this one also is highly unsatisfying. The title itself indicates a lack of hierarchical value or causal relationship of ideas. The essays remain the works of individual scholars, who examine the presuppositions of their own disciplines in the light of their own erudition, which is not that of the reader, and attempt to bring this all together in a few pages. Each essay remains a kind of island in the vast sea of knowledge.

The commentaries are often incisive in probing the weaknesses of an essay, but this does not provide a positive foundation of unified, interlocking, cohesive ideas. The first essay should be a kind of foundation for the rest, but, in his commentary, Dr. Pellegrino finds Michael Scriven's "Axiom of Equality" to be scarcely more than the development of an up-dated Utilitarianism. This is no small fault and should have been resolved before continuing the discussion of other essays. Is this perhaps a tacit approval of the methodology of pure science? Moreover, since the discussants remain in the same essential ethical disagreement after their discussions as before, the thoughtful reader will not expect to be led to a profound, unified understanding of science, ethics and medicine, even though this seems to be largely in harmony with the third purpose of the project. Ultimately, the real cause of disunity in the book would seem to come from a lack of agreement among the essayists, although some papers discuss it, regarding the nature of man and his ultimate finality.

Two essays especially might prove intellectually provocative to the reflective doctor. Ladd's very closely reasoned, philosophical analysis of the compatibility of science and ethics can help to establish criteria for ethical discourse in medical

moral matters. The essay by Gorovitz and MacIntyre, "Toward a Theory of Medical Fallibility," argues for a science of particulars, which would revise societal response to medical error, the physician's liability for error and the patient's attitude toward the physician.

— Thomas L. Kenealy, S.J.
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Bioethics

Thomas A. Shannon, Editor

Paulist Press, 1865 Broadway, New York, N. Y. 10023, 1976. 523 pp., \$9.95 (paper).

The fast-growing literature in "bioethics" (still an infant science) is already becoming unwieldy. Good editorial work, to collect the most valuable contributions, is and will be an essential task. Thomas Shannon has successfully addressed this need in *Bioethics: basic writings on the key ethical questions that surround the major modern biological possibilities and problems*.

Twenty-nine reprinted articles by Callahan, Bok, Gustafson, McCormick, Capron, Kass, Veatch, Walters, Childress, Lappé, Roblin, Outka, the Fletchers, and others are included. The hefty book is arranged in topical sections: 1) abortion, 2) severely handicapped children, 3) death and dying, 4) research and human experimentation, 5) genetic engineering and genetic policy, 6) allocation of scarce resources, and 7) behavior control.

In his introductory essay, Shannon neatly summarizes the development of Roman Catholic tradition in moral theology. He chides those who expect simplicity here, or who capitulate to inappropriate authoritarianism. He is careful to draw the crucial distinction between the Church's attempts to mediate the wisdom of long experience and reflection, and Her capacity to make definitive immutable pronouncements (the latter *never* having been employed for *any* moral/ethical question).

Some of the papers found here are milestones, even "classics" in bioethics. For example, an article by Lappé *et al.* (1972), on issues in genetic screening, was probably influential in the framing of a major book on that subject (B. Childs *et al.*, 1975, National Academy of Sciences).

The notion of *justice* has received renewed attention lately. Shannon demonstrates his awareness of this important trend by inclusion of excellent articles by Jonson, Outka, and Childress in his selection on allocation of scarce resources.

The strength of this compendium is in the disparity of the opinions expressed within it. The book is designedly pluralistic, to stimulate critical thinking among students, professionals, and other interested persons. It is highly recommended as a source-book, reference, or college text.

— Robert Roger Lebel, S.J.,
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