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Vincent C. Punzo

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Medical Ethics and Social Change

Bernard Barber, Editor

The American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104, May, 1978. vi + 201 pp., \$4.50 (paper), \$5.50 (hardcover).

This issue of *The Annals* consists of 12 essays written by different authors who have served on a variety of governmental and professional boards in the fields of medicine and health care and who have credentials in such areas as sociology, law, public administration, philosophy, and medicine. The majority of essays focuses on one of two themes, the rights of human experimental subjects and the delivery of health care services. Helpful historical background for the first theme is provided by Stanley Joel Reiser's essay which sketches the history of the interplay between patient care and medical research in the United States and Great Britain from the turn of the century to the present. Three other essays also deal directly with the rights' theme.

John J. Lally explores the issue through a number of studies which deal with the selection process and education of research physicians in order to uncover the factors which contribute to a moral concern with the rights of human subjects. His conclusion involves proposals for improvement which include dependence on both internal and external controls to protect these rights. John D. Arnold directs his essay to making a case for the use of *ad hoc* moral principles instead of dependence on the strict interpretation of established ethical codes as a basis for determining subject populations for drug research. Pointing out that a strict interpretation of the Helsinki Declaration seems to require that an experimental drug be given only to patients actually suffering from the illness which the drug is intended to treat, he argues that experimental drugs may be of greater danger for a sick person than for a healthy person and that the sick person may have greater difficulty being indemnified for any harm suffered than the healthy person because it could be argued that it was the patient's illness and not the drug that caused the harm. At best, Arnold's argument has succeeded in calling into question one feature of the Helsinki Declaration, but it is not adequate to sustaining his call for replacing established ethical codes with *ad hoc* moral principles.

The ethical issues involved in various stages of research projects dealing with human subjects are outlined in an essay co-authored by three professionals in epidemiology. Calling for ethical standards that are in keeping both with the scientist's need for information and experimentation and with the rights of experimental subjects, the authors advance their case with an awareness that scientists form an interest group whose interests may often not be restricted to the pursuit of knowledge and may be in conflict with the interests of others.

Three other essays deal with themes which are broader than that of the rights of human experimental subjects, but which have a bearing on the latter issue. Bradford Gray does an excellent job in presenting evidence that indicates that the informed consent ideal as actually practiced today with regard to both research subjects and patients tends to be more a matter of going through certain procedures to protect physicians and researchers from lawsuits than of trying to insure that the patient or subject is properly informed about the nature of his or her involvement and the risks faced. Daniel Callahan's "Abortion and Medical Ethics" concentrates on the fall-out issues resulting from the 1973 Supreme Court decision which include problems concerning fetal research, in addition to problems engendered by advances in medical technology concerning the meaning of "viability" and of "potentiality for human life." Writing as a supporter of the Supreme

Court decision, he emphasizes that such issues as the aforementioned have not been fully dealt with by that decision and that they stand in need of reflective moral evaluation and discussion.

Frank P. Grad's "Medical Ethics and the Law" includes in its survey of the areas of contemporary medicine that involve an interplay of legal and ethical factors those concerning clinical experimentation and informed consent for surgery and other techniques, as well as problems revolving around questions concerning the duty to treat, to be truthful with patients, and the problem of when one may terminate the treatment of the critically ill. Diana Crane's essay deals with this latter issue from the perspective of trying to determine from survey results whether physicians tend to use social criteria rather than physical criteria as ultimately determining factors in their decisions concerning the extent to which they ought to go in trying to prolong the lives of critically ill persons.

Three essays may be classified in dealing with different aspects of problems concerning the delivery of health care services. David Mechanic explores different possible systems for the rationing of such services. Amitai Etzioni calls into question the developing consensus that individual responsibility must be made the fulcrum for the achievement of health gains in the near future. Without denying the need for such responsibility, Etzioni expresses concern that too much of a burden is being placed on the individual and argues that efforts must be made both to combat those sociological conditions that contribute to the development of bad health habits and to develop those social conditions and technologies that will help the individual practice good health habits.

Jeffrey Berlant contrasts the conception of the physician's role found in the medical ethics of Thomas Percival in the 19th century with the ethical code written by John Gregory in the 18th century, pointing out that Percival's work grounds the monopolistic conception of the medical profession that has been dominant in the AMA whereas Gregory's work offers a basis for a non-monopolistic conception. Berlant favors Gregory's conception as offering better promise for rational health care services planning.

Each essay in this collection is excellent from the perspective of providing a helpful survey of the literature and alternatives related to its topic. The collection thus provides a good starting point for more in-depth research and reflection on the topics treated.

— Vincent C. Punzo, Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
Saint Louis University