

8-1-1983

[Book Review of] *Medical Ethics*, by Peter Doherty, M.D.

E. F. Diamond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Diamond, E. F. (1983) "[Book Review of] *Medical Ethics*, by Peter Doherty, M.D.," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 50 : No. 3 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol50/iss3/19>

scholarly introduction to a hitherto neglected area. However, neither the project itself nor this particular volume is intended to be merely an exercise in historical scholarship. Rather, the hope is to reinforce a prophetic role and to help people struggle with the newly emerging medical moral issues. Thus, there are articles on the interface of medicine and theology and the theological foundation of medical ethics. The practical issues are addressed in sections on preventive medicine and pastoral perspectives. There is an extensive bibliography, some 30 pages in length.

A basic problem in such a project is methodology. Some basis of communication must be established between the different faith traditions and between the particular traditions and medicine. It is proposed that philosophy can function as such a vehicle of communication, helping to solve the conceptual problems that particular traditions engender for themselves and for those outside the traditions. Philosophy, it is suggested, may establish the formal structures of reasonableness, while the traditions may provide the content. This proposal is not without its problems. Philosophy has its own cultural background and value presuppositions. It is not merely a neutral instrument. There is a tension here which may be a source of difficulty in the more detailed studies which are to follow.

The project is concerned with providing normative guidance. Clarity in case law, public policy and decision-making require substantive moral insight. For those who seek to provide such insight, the faith traditions offer a treasury of directives of which much is to be appropriated and much discarded (p. 220). But what are to be the criteria of selection? This volume leaves that question unanswered. What is the role of religious authority in the particular traditions and how does this bear on normative guidance? The volume is a valuable introduction and it will be interesting to see how these questions are answered.

— Brian V. Johnstone, C.Ss.R.
The Catholic University of America

Medical Ethics

Peter Doherty, M.D.

White Lodge, Bristol, England, 82 pp.

This short text is described by its author, a general practitioner from London as a "contribution to medical ethics." Readers should not expect a comprehensive treatment of medical ethics or even a handbook of medical ethics. Dr. Doherty's topics are self-selected, but include most of the major issues of bioethical controversy. The author touches on points of issue with brevity, but with a gift for defining and synthesizing the opposite sides of a debate. The perspective is always that of a Roman Catholic, loyal to the expressed teachings of the Magisterium. The essays on conscience, manipulation of life and euthanasia are particularly cogent and well reasoned. The discussion of trans-sexual surgery was less impressive, considering that this form of surgery is now almost totally discredited even at the Johns Hopkins gender clinic where John Money was its most active promoter. The section on abortion was less than effective in its treatment of individuation. The discussion of cost-benefit equations is from the standpoint of the British National Health Service.

The style is lucid and never ponderous. The tone is reverent and aimed primarily at believing Christians. It is a worthwhile contribution to the subject of medical ethics which can be digested at a single sitting.

— E. F. Diamond, M.D.