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Logic and Criticism

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Physicians have long been respected for their carefully weighed mature decisions on important clinical problems. They weigh and critically evaluate the positive and negative data, draw on direct experience and that gleaned from the literature and reach a valid decision. In civic, intellectual, cultural and social fields their assistance and judgment are frequently sought.

In recent years there has appeared a rather unique change in much of our medical literature. It formerly had been restricted to the scientific aspects of medicine, clinical observation, the growing battery of diagnostic aids, computers *et al* and a broadening array of therapeutic agents. But now the social and occasionally the moral aspects of therapeutic aids and prophylactic measures have entered the scene.

Much of this was initiated when so many were interviewed on the morality of the use of the atom bomb, and the subsequent development of more violent weapons of massive destruction. Sports figures, war heroes, entertainers, mathematicians came forward with their sage and meaningful comments.

The social and moral aspects were merely mentioned in passing, but with the growing governmental influence on medicine, these factors came more to the fore. The rapidly emerging field of organ transplants, now limited to the renal field, is loaded with these implied problems.

The more prosaic fields of conception control, usually with governmental aid, artificial insemination, more legal freedom for abortions and sterilization and the broad implications of situations of morality are all being discussed, bypassing the practical secular solutions.

Sociologists through public and private agencies and psychologists have been assuming a growing role in determining policies in these fields for the good of society. All too often, physicians who are directly involved are by-passed and rarely informed after decisions have been reached.

To properly hold to the traditions and responsibilities of their profession and to help shape public opinion, physicians must apply the same critical evaluation to these studies that they regularly utilize in medical practice. The experimental data must be checked for accuracy and objectivity and a meaningful analysis of conclusions reached.

Logic, it will be recalled, is the art which perfects the intellect for the art of reasoning — proceeding to new knowledge on the framework of solid old knowledge. Years ago one of the well-known Greek philosophers, Socrates, noted that most mistakes in judgment were made when reason was influenced by emotion and physical desires. It's not too shocking to realize that

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human nature is the same now as it was then, stepping into the same mistakes.

In addition there are many other violations of rules of sound discourse called fallacies. The ones most commonly encountered include appeal to popular passion in order to make a point. This is currently being utilized freely in the drive for legalizing abortions in several states. Arguments aimed primarily at pity, appealing to sympathy rather than to reason to make a point is another popular fallacy. This was well exemplified in all the press coverage of the woman who traveled to Europe for a therapeutic abortion because

of the ingestion of a drug during pregnancy that might result in a congenital abnormality.

Another commonly employed device is begging the question, assuming in the premise of a discussion the very conclusion that requires real proof.

So the cold critical light of total objectivity must be utilized to properly criticize the social and moral aspects of medical problems just as it functions in scientific medicine. Basic information, usage of data in arriving at conclusions and knowledge of common fallacies must all be checked for a comprehensive evaluation.

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