5-1-1986


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Available at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol53/iss2/14
Ideal, Fact, and Medicine
by Charles J. Dougherty


"It might be said by some that this whole work is far too relativistic, that it accepts too easily the claim that there are other significant moral alternatives, and that it therefore provides no absolute foundation for the choice of these ideals and the associated ethical
theory. In response, I admit to a good degree of relativism” (p. 172). With these words, the author, a professor of ethics at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, presents us with a succinct review of his analysis of ethical theory as applied to problem areas of medical ethics, basing his ethical analysis upon a synthesis of the thought of the English emotivists and the largely subjective Kantian ideal of personal autonomy. Dougherty stresses instruction of values as the basis of morality and states that ethics should refine and clarify moral instructions.

When discussing medical research, Dougherty expresses shock and horror at the human research protocols carried out by the Nazi medical experimenters (p. 143). After describing some of the horrors perpetrated during the second World War, Dougherty rightly points out that the ideology which allowed such experiments developed well before the second World War. But, ironically, when assigning causes for the Nazis’ abuse of human rights, Dougherty fails to list the type of relativistic ethical theory which he espouses.

The best part of the book is a study of the ethical and legal responsibilities of hospitals. Most of the significant legal decisions in regard to hospital care are presented and a very clear list of patient rights and hospital duties is afforded. In this section especially, Dougherty displays a comprehensive view of the values and actions which would improve institutional health care.

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Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, Vol. 1
Theology and Ethics
by James M. Gustafson


Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, Vol. 2
Ethics and Theology
by James M. Gustafson


These two works complement each other. The first develops a theocentric perspective; the second sets out to explore the question, What difference does a theocentric perspective make to the interpretation of morality? Together they constitute an intriguing and thought-provoking study. While the work of any Christian ethicist or moral theologian presupposes certain theological positions, it is rare to find these elaborated systematically and at length. A serious reader is compelled to grapple with many of the most basic religious issues and