

The Linacre Quarterly

Volume 45 | Number 2

Article 18

5-1-1978

[Book Review of] *Medical/Moral Problems*, edited by Robert Heyer

Albert S. Moraczewski

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

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

Recommended Citation

Moraczewski, Albert S. (1978) "[Book Review of] *Medical/Moral Problems*, edited by Robert Heyer," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 45: No. 2, Article 18.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol45/iss2/18>

sensitive concern for homosexuals as persons. *Counseling the Homosexual* is well worth its inflationary price and Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. is to be congratulated for producing it.

— Rev. Donald McCarthy
Mt. St. Mary Seminary

Medical / Moral Problems

Robert Heyer, Editor

Paulist Press, 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023, 1978. 64 pp., \$1.75.

This 64-page book is a collection of nine articles which originally appeared in the September/October, 1976 issue of *New Catholic World*.

Charles E. Curran provides a concise overview of medical ethics, beginning with a brief historical study. Until recently, conflicts between medicine and ethics were relatively few because the good of the individual patient was a criterion for both fields. Tensions developed, especially in matters of human reproduction because Catholic theology taught that the generative organs and faculty were for the good of the species, as well as of the individual. With the advent of rapid advances in biomedical technology and its overflow into medical practice, ethical dilemmas proliferated. Father Curran proceeds to sketch out a number of problem areas in medical ethics: initiation or discontinuation of life support systems; organ transplantation; human experimentation; prioritization in the allocation of scarce resources; and technological reproduction.

Edmund V. Sullivan perceptually reviews Ivan Illich's *Medical Nemesis* in light of the South American educator Paolo Friere's principles for "problem posing education" and in doing so helps the reader to reflect critically on the institution of medicine. This article, perhaps more than others, is likely to provoke opposition. No doubt it is difficult to step outside one's profession and view it with a cool, critical eye. Sullivan's tone is less abrasive than Illich's, yet his remarks are probing and, while disagreeing with many of Illich's conclusions, he holds that the medical profession has become "one of the many sacred cows that our culture dishes up to us in a porridge which discourages critical appraisal.

In an article by Richard L. Rashke, Washington Correspondent for *The National Catholic Reporter*, seven physicians and paramedical personnel were interviewed and asked what each believed to be the most significant ethical/medical issue in their respective fields and in society today. They were also asked about their manner of making medical/ethical decisions, and their way of dealing with patient/therapist value discordance.

In an article on the "Physician's Role as Spiritual Healer," Dr. Frank A. Iula argues persuasively for the view that the physician is an instrument of God's grace. To serve the sick he uses his gifts and the healing substances found in nature prepared by man's skills. To accomplish this in a manner which proclaims God's glory requires the physician to have established personally a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

Leonard J. Weber helps to clarify the question as to who makes the decision by distinguishing *medical* decisions, as such, and *moral* decisions in a medical context. That *moral* decisions are not to be left to medical experts is the first point Weber makes. The second point is that moral principles and guidelines have a proper function and should be used, ruling out a situation ethics approach. Professor Weber concludes with a third item: "Be prepared to make judgments and decisions on your own."

Not to be overlooked are articles on the mentally retarded, the resolution of conflicts which may arise between the values of the therapist and those of the clients, and organ transplantation.

In addition to the small type, the text is occasionally marred by typos, e.g., "interviewer" for "interviewee" (p. 6), "Iatrogenis" for "iatrogenesis" (p. 58), and by the consistent misspelling, "iatrogenis" for "iatrogenesis" (pp. 58-60). But for \$1.75, should one complain? In sum, this work could be considered as a small sampler of selected issues in medical ethics.

— Albert S. Moraczewski, O.P., Ph.D.

The Sterilization Controversy: A New Crisis for the Catholic Hospital?

Rev. John P. Boyle

Paulist Press, New York, 1977. 99 pp.

The recent annual meeting of the National Federation highlighted the issue of "geographical morality" with regard to the issue of direct sterilization in Catholic hospitals. Seldom has a subject been so completely emphasized and clarified as the immorality of direct sterilization. The clear prohibition of *Humanae Vitae* was incorporated into Directives 20 and 21 of the Hospital Code which was, in turn, overwhelmingly accepted by the bishops of the United States. When questions arose as to the applicability of exceptions based on the principle of totality, the common good, the existence of contrary opinion, etc., a further clarification came forth from the Holy See which was forthright and unambiguous in its condemnation of all direct sterilizations and the possibility of their performance in Catholic health facilities. Nevertheless reports persist of "sterilization committees" functioning in certain dioceses, apparently adjudicating in these geographical pockets of deviation, what is incontrovertibly prohibited elsewhere in the universal Church.

The Sterilization Controversy is a blueprint for the justification of such committees. Father Boyle does not deny that the Pope and the bishops clearly teach that direct sterilization is objectively immoral nor does he deny the Church's authority to make pronouncements regarding moral matters. He does suggest, however, that such pronouncements should be regarded as merely "provisional" because of the existence of contrary theological opinion. The usual galaxy of advocates of the ethics of proportionate good are Father Boyle's sources of theological opinion and these are cited exclusively without reference to a balance of opposing theological viewpoints. Father Boyle and his supporting theological sources do not admit of the existence of objectively and intrinsically evil moral actions. In the case of sterilization, the pre-moral or ontic evil is judged to be proportionately less than the future good to be derived from the guarantee of the non-pregnant state. Other advocates of the same moral theory have claimed proportionate goods to justify direct abortion but Father Boyle is not willing to go that far. The author would assert the right of Catholic hospitals to perform direct sterilizations justified on the grounds of material cooperation. No mention is made of the need to consult the local ordinary in such a decision-making process. His rationalization is similar to that propounded by Fathers Charles Curran and Kevin O'Rourke. This rationale has been effectively rebutted in the