

# Book Reviews

## Life on the Line: Ethics, Aging, Ending Patients' Lives, and Allocating Vital Resources

John F. Kilner

William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, 350 pp., \$18.95 (paperback)

TWO OF THE MOST PRESSING ETHICAL issues in healthcare deal with the use of life-sustaining measures and the allocation of vital and limited resources. These issues intersect in the lives of patients, their families, and our society as a whole. Rarely has an author attempted to deal with these converging issues in a single work. John F. Kilner has now presented us with such a book.

A fascinating dimension to this work is the Christian perspective out of which Kilner operates. He proposes that Christian ethics has a great deal to offer in the search for a resolution to what is rapidly becoming an ethical quagmire.

When Kilner speaks of the contribution that Scripture and theology can make, he avoids an all-too-common pitfall: a fundamentalist leaning which suggests that the Bible can give simple and direct answers to issues not present when it was written, such as the use of ventilators. But this is not to say that the Bible is not a rich source of guidance, and Kilner deftly helps us find it.

Throughout the book, Kilner describes Christian ethics as God centered, reality bound, and love impelled. God centered means we are to act as God acts, hold to the values of God, and be who God would have us be. The

Scriptures are communications from God and can therefore help us discern God's will, which is not an easy task. God has created persons and the world in a certain way, with certain realities, both physical and moral. As St. Paul would express it, who we are in Christ determines how we should live and act. Love of God and neighbor is what should direct our choices.

After a lengthy description of this basic ethical theory, Kilner turns to the first main issue, euthanasia. He does an excellent job of discussing death—which is both enemy and destiny, both cross and resurrection—and suffering, which is certainly not good in itself, but, when accepted as Christ accepted it, can be redemptive for oneself and for others. Euthanasia and suicide are therefore unacceptable because they align us with death instead of with God, who works for

## RESOURCE BRIEFS

### Health Journeys for People with Cancer

Belleruth Naparstek, *Image Paths*, Cleveland, 1991, \$10.95 (audiocassette)

Part of a series of guided imagery tapes, this audiocassette is designed to help people relax and focus their minds to speed the healing process. On one side, Naparstek, a psychotherapist and clinical social worker, guides listeners to a "safe place" where they can visualize the "fighter cells" in the body eliminating any cancer cells. The reverse side offers a series of positive statements to counter negative thinking.

### Victims of Dementia: Services, Support, and Care

William Michael Clemmer, *Haworth Pastoral Press*, Binghamton, NY, 1993, 161 pp., \$26.95 (hardcover), \$19.95 (paperback)

*Victims of Dementia* provides an in-depth look at the concept, construction, and operation of Wesley Hall, a special living area for persons with dementia. The author begins by describing the process of creating Wesley Hall, including planning the physical environment, selecting and training staff, selecting residents, and generating family involvement. Then, he provides an account of its expansion and relocation. Nine appendixes give additional information about various aspects of planning and operating living areas for victims of dementia.

### Public Mental Health Marketing: Developing a Consumer Attitude

Donald R. Self, ed., *Haworth Press*, Binghamton, NY, 1993, 214 pp., \$32.95 (hardcover), \$25.95 (paperback)

*Public Mental Health Marketing* presents a cross section of recent research

on persons involved in the mental health system, including clients, donors, internal stakeholders, and the general public. Sections focus on marketing to the public, primary and secondary consumers of mental health services, and adolescents. The final section features promotional and evaluational marketing approaches, as well as case studies of mental health-care marketing successes.

### The Prevention of Depression: Research and Practice

Ricardo F. Muñoz and Yu-Wen Ying, *Johns Hopkins University Press*, Baltimore, 1993, 326 pp., \$65

This book's premise, the authors note, "is that much human suffering is unnecessary and may be reduced substantially if we systematically identify and change those factors that increase suffering for ourselves and others." Part I presents key concepts in the prevention of



good and life in the midst of suffering and death. Recognizing that at some point certain medical interventions are inappropriate is not playing God, but resisting the temptation to claim God's ultimate responsibility over life and death.

Healthcare funding may well remain limited in large part because of misplaced priorities. In his careful analysis of this complex issue, Kilner draws some interesting conclusions, notably:

- Expensive technologies often do not offer as much health benefit for the dollar as many forms of less expensive maintenance and preventive healthcare.

- In setting priorities, we must not slight certain groups of people by allowing them to bear a disproportionately high share of the burden.

- Wise use of resources, such as for palliative care, may help lessen the clamor call to legalized euthanasia and assist-

depression. In part II, Muñoz and Wen examine research on preventive interventions. Part III describes the San Francisco Depression Prevention Research Project. And parts IV and V discuss implications of research on the subject and provide some personal reflections on the depression-prevention enterprise.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

**Health Care Ethics Committees: The Next Generation**, Judith Wilson Ross et al., American Hospital Publishing, Chicago, 1993

**International Directory of Bioethics Organizations**, Anita L. Nolen and Mary Carrington Coutts, eds., Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 1993

ed suicide sought by many who fear the pain and alienation associated with the dying process.

Although *Life on the Line* may at times become ponderous in its detail, it remains an excellent work and tremendous resource for healthcare professionals or anyone else interested in the contribution of a distinctively Christian ethics. The guidance that Kilner offers will be a help to individuals and to the development of a truly just and compassionate public policy.

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## Dementia and Aging: Ethics, Values, and Policy Choices

**Robert H. Binstock, PhD; Stephen G. Post, PhD; and Peter J. Whitehouse, MD, PhD, editors**

*Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992, 184 pp., \$50 (hardback), \$18.95 (paperback)*

IN HIS FOREWORD, ROBERT N. BUTLER, MD, writes, "The words in the title *Dementia and Aging: Ethics, Values, and Policy Choices* are in the right order: discussion of aging and dementia creates the need to consider ethics, values, and the ultimate choices of action, since policy choices will have to be made, like it or not." The current discussions of national healthcare reform make this a particularly timely book for those who struggle either to form choices or to deal with the choices made.

Professionals from various disciplines contributed to the book's three sections: an exploration of the medical knowledge and care-giving implications of dementia, the ethical and value choices that confront families and professionals, and

the macropolicy decisions that will shape the future of dementia care.

The greatest value in this book lies not in the answers it provides but rather in the questions it poses. The medical discussion may be too clinically detailed for some readers, but the descriptions of care-giving dilemmas are very real to those involved in dementia care. What does the patient really experience? How do we interpret previously executed advance directives in light of that experience? What of the person who has no advance directives? What is the meaning of the principle of autonomy? How do we properly weigh the burden-benefit question in dealing with those in the various stages of dementia?

We may not agree with the viewpoints of each of the contributors, but each raises nuances of the debate that challenge us to examine our beliefs and our actions and stimulate discussions among family and professional care givers, ethics committees, policymakers, and others.

In the book's third section, the authors discuss the public policy implications of dementia care. One contributor suggests, "In the last decade Alzheimer's disease has moved, in the phrase of sociologist C. Wright Mills, from a private sorrow to being understood as a public problem." The sheer number of persons affected and the changing range of services they and their support systems need as the disease progresses have moved dementia care to the public arena. Political realities exist: Research directions will be chosen, and scarce resources will be allocated by design or default among the sometimes conflicting demands for home-based, community-based, and institutional care.

As policy decisions are made, whether institution specific or national in scope, the questions the authors raise should be explored. The content and style of this collection encourage us to do so.

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