

Book Reviews

Inquiries in Bioethics

Stephen G. Post

Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 1993, 179 pp., \$35 (clothbound), \$17.95 (paperback)

THROUGH SEVERAL OF HIS PREVIOUSLY published essays, Stephen G. Post offers readers an intriguing analysis of many of today's more challenging issues in bioethics.

Although the book is not presented as a comprehensive theoretical or clinical assessment of bioethics, some common threads run throughout Post's essays. These common threads help readers appreciate contemporary bioethics, a field that combines clinical reality with a sociocultural analysis of the mixed blessing brought by modern medicine and developments in biomedical research. Of special interest is Post's sensitive analysis of the role of biomedical technology and

the limits of our dominion over human nature.

The nine chapters in *Inquiries in Bioethics* cover many topics, ranging from genetic engineering to a medical critique of biocentrism. I will review a representative sample of these chapters as examples of Post's overall approach to bioethics.

"Designer Babies, Selective Abortion, and Human Perfection" is an interesting and compelling analysis of the meaning of emerging genetic discoveries and their potential to manipulate the very meaning of the human person and the reproductive process. Post sees a danger that this new technological knowledge, unchecked by critical reflection, may depress—rather than broaden—our appreciation for what it means to be human. He is particularly concerned that this new knowledge may limit our multidimensional understanding of the human person to a one-dimensional

notion of genetic perfectibility.

In "The Moral Meaning of Relinquishing an Infant: Reflections on Adoption," Post argues that the pro-choice mentality reduces our ability to view adoption as a viable alternative to abortion. Persons who believe adoption is a viable alternative to abortion view the life of the unborn child within the framework of a community of caring persons, not in a materialistic fashion as disposable property. As such, a pregnant woman can turn to others for assistance in preserving and nurturing the child she is unable to care for after birth.

"Adolescents in Time of AIDS: Values and Preventive Education" offers a politically incorrect approach to dealing with adolescent sexual activity. Although Post recognizes the need to educate adolescents about AIDS prevention, he strongly suggests that we will be cheating our youth if we fail to offer them a broader vision of human sexuality than is cur-

BOOK BRIEFS

Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Violent Environments: Hurt, Healing, and Hope

Joy D. Osofsky and Emily Fenichel, eds., *Zero to Three/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs, Arlington, VA, 1994, 48 pp., \$4.95 plus \$2.50 shipping (paperback)*

This report documents the experiences and coping strategies of parents who are living in violent surroundings. Written for parents, child care providers, teachers, police officers, healthcare professionals, and others who work with families in violent environments, the report presents research findings and case reports that illustrate what is known about the impact of early experiences of violence on development. It suggests ways for adults to cope successfully with their own experi-

ences of violence, so they can in turn help very young children master potentially devastating trauma.

A Minister's Handbook of Mental Disorders

Joseph W. Ciarrocchi, *Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1993, 221 pp., \$14.95 (paperback)*

Many clergy feel unprepared by seminary or professional training to handle mental health problems, even though some report they spend nearly 50 percent of their work time counseling clients. The book's goal is to help clergy recognize mental disorders, assess a client's level of impairment, know when to refer a client to a mental health professional, and know how to relate pastorally to persons who are mentally ill and their families.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Aging in the Lord, Mary Hester Valentine, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1994

American Health Care: Rebirth or Suicide? Benjamin F. Fuller, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, IL, 1994

Codependency: PowerLoss, Soul-Loss, Dorothy May, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1994

Primer Dios: Alcoholics Anonymous and the Hispanic Community, Kenneth G. Davis, Susquehanna University Press, Cranbury, NJ, 1994

When Death Is Sought: Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia in the Medical Context, New York State Task Force on Life and the Law, New York City, 1994

rently promoted by popular culture and the media.

This preventive education should appeal to the idealism of youth. Such an approach is preferable to reducing adolescent sexuality to a one-dimensional biological function. Post also points out that the politically correct approach to AIDS prevention among adolescents grossly underestimates the danger of AIDS transmission even among those who routinely practice so-called safer sex.

"Old-Age-based Rationing, Dementia, and Quality of Life" questions a number of popular assumptions about aging Americans, especially in relation to healthcare delivery. Post repudiates many myths about the need for rationing healthcare to the elderly, as well as the popular assertion that providing healthcare to the elderly constitutes the most significant economic drain on the healthcare system today.

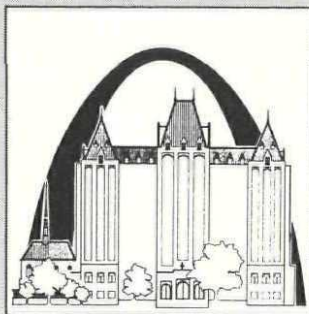
In addition, Post offers a treatise on the need to think about the elderly and the aging process within a new framework. We need to view older Americans as a valuable resource within our culture, but at the same time we must allow our senior *citizens* to fully participate in shaping the nature of their unique contribution to society and culture.

Inquiries in Bioethics is must reading for those who wish to keep abreast of recent developments in the ethics of medicine and healthcare delivery and for all persons who would like to analyze these developments within the context of a sociocultural critique of American society. In all the issues he addresses, Post touches on the obvious and then introduces readers to new lanes of inquiry and reflection. His broader vision of many of the issues he examines leaves readers refreshed and anxious for more.

John J. Mitchell, Jr., PhD
Chairperson

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