

Book Reviews

Mercy or Murder? Euthanasia, Morality and Public Policy

Edited by Rev. Kenneth R. Overberg, SJ

Sheed & Ward, Kansas City, MO, 1993, 300 pp., \$15.95 (paperback)

IN THE COURSE OF THE CURRENT PUBLIC debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide, many of us have felt an increasing desire for some reasoned discourse on the topic. The reduction of complex analyses to 30-second sound bites, the exchange of slogans that appeal to raw emotions, the invoking of supposed authorities—these are the circumstances

that doom the outcome of the whole discussion around that fatal, final decision at the end of life: to aggressively end one's life, alone or with another's aid, or to humanize the dying process while accepting the course of terminal illness.

The debate over the legalization of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide is intensifying, and public support for some form of legalization appears to be growing. After unsuccessful attempts at legalizing physician-assisted suicide in Washington and California (under such titles as "death with dignity" and "aid-in-dying"), its proponents have launched a similar initiative in Oregon, the Oregon "Death with Dignity Act." The effort in Oregon reflects a strategic

improvement over past campaigns, in that legislative and political "trouble spots" have been either eliminated or reformulated to create broader support for the initiative. Rev. Kenneth R. Overberg, SJ, expresses his hope "that this text will contribute to this difficult-but-necessary reasoning concerning euthanasia that is so important in our society today." Important, indeed!

The editor has organized an anthology of recent articles that have been most significant in shaping the debate at the professional and technical level. He makes a good choice in using the very readable overview of the topic by Rev. John Paris, SJ, as the introduction. The major sections of the volume include readings "For Euthanasia" and "Against

BOOK BRIEFS

Managing Stress: Principles and Strategies for Health and Wellbeing

Brian Luke Seaward, Jones & Bartlett Publishers, Boston, 1994, 405 pp., \$33.75 (paperback)

The author, who argues that other stress management textbooks put too much emphasis on the physiological aspects of stress, attempts in his own text to restore the balance among physical, psychological, and spiritual factors.

In 27 chapters he examines the nature of stress, surveys various psychological theories of its origins, and describes coping mechanisms and relaxation techniques.

Midwife for Souls: Spiritual Care for the Dying

Kathy Kalina, St. Paul Books & Media, Boston, 1993, 111 pp., \$4.95 (paperback)

This book describes the experiences of a young woman who, after assisting at the

death of her best friend, decided to become a hospice care nurse. The author argues that medical experts are usually ill equipped to comfort the dying, whose primary needs she sees as spiritual rather than medical. She believes family members and hospice workers are likely to provide dying people with the best care and offers them guidelines, including discussions on the physical and spiritual process of dying, prayer, and pastoral care.

The Health Care Organizational Survey System

Donald N. Lombardi, American Hospital Publishing, Chicago, 1994, 189 pp., \$40 (AHA members), \$50 (non-members) (paperback)

In six chapters this text tells healthcare executives how to survey employee attitudes without hiring consultants. Appendixes include a survey instrument; a guide to interpreting survey results; 20

substitutes for the sample survey; and a sample action plan for addressing the results of the survey.

Ethics of Health Care: An Introductory Textbook, 2d ed.

Benedict M. Ashley and Kevin D. O'Rourke, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 1994, 284 pp., \$24.95 (paperback)

Arguing that the revolutions in medical and information technology have made patients and other laypersons integral parts of the medical decision-making process, the authors have written this textbook for people outside the health-care professions. In 12 chapters they discuss ethical questions from a Christian point of view, including concepts of health and disease; personal, professional, and social responsibility for health, sexuality, and reproduction; psychotherapy; death and dying; and spiritual ministry.

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A series of articles profile successful programs for meeting the community's needs, including healthcare outreach to rural areas, prescription funds for low-income patients, a mobile van to serve children, and health fairs at local work sites.

Euthanasia." Different readers will react differently to the articles, regardless of their stand on euthanasia. One of us found the articles "For Euthanasia" more convincing; the other thought the readings "Against Euthanasia" were more persuasive.

These articles are followed by brief sections on the Patient Self-Determination Act and artificial nutrition and hydration. Where relevant, Fr. Overberg has included classic end-of-life documents, such as the Vatican "Declaration on Euthanasia." The text also includes "Neither for Love Nor Money: Why Doctors Must Not Kill," possibly one of the most useful writings for persons who want to articulate opposition to the legalization of practices such as euthana-

sia or physician-assisted suicide.

Some entries were originally written for a popular audience; others are addressed to professional readers. This unevenness is not necessarily detrimental to the overall purpose of the work, since it scans a range of arguments and "arguers." Each selection is followed by questions for reflection and discussion, and an appendix offers eight medical cases for discussion.

Most serious students of the topic probably read many of these articles at the time they were published. However, reading them together in this format is a useful review. This anthology will prove most valuable as a guide for discussion—in college classes and adult education programs—and for political action groups in shaping their positions.

The limitations of a work like this lie in the dynamic nature of the public debate on euthanasia. Although some of the articles will continue to be timely and applicable, it will be necessary to reformulate and nuance arguments as the political movement evolves. Response to the current Oregon initiative on the "right to die" will demand new thinking, for proponents as well as opponents. The real challenge is not to simply assimilate what these authors have contributed to the debate, but to move beyond them in thinking and speaking critically about the long-term consequences—personal and societal—of how we interpret and apply the values that determine public policies for a most vulnerable group in society: those who struggle with the pain and illness that is destined to visit all our lives.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Church and Ministry Strategic Planning: From Concept to Success, R. Henry Migliore, Robert E. Stevens, and David L. Loudon, Haworth Press, Binghamton, NY, 1994

Holocaust Survivors' Mental Health, T. L. Brink, ed., Haworth Press, Binghamton, NY, 1994

Journey to Self-Awareness: A Spiritual Notebook for Everyday Life, Noreen Monroe Guzie and Tad Guzie, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1994

Marketing Mental Health Services to Managed Care, Norman Winegar and John L. Bistline, Haworth Press, Binghamton, NY 1994

The Relentless Hunger: The Heart's Search for Love, James E. Sullivan, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1994