

Buchbesprechungen/Analyses de livres

Physician-Assisted Death, Biomedical Ethics Reviews 1993

James M. Humber, Robert F. Almeder, Gregg A. Kasting (Eds.) 165 S., hardcover, \$ 39.50. The Humana Press Inc., Totowa New Jersey 1993. ISBN 0-896-03265-5, ISSN 0742-1796

This well-written book, the eleventh volume of Biomedical Ethical Reviews, contains six essays, each by different authors, focused on physician-assisted dying. D.F. Meier presents a review (49 references) of the literature dealing with attitudes towards euthanasia and experiences with physician-assisted death. Several recent U.S. public opinion polls indicate that a consistent majority of respondents support some form of physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients. Surveys of physicians' opinions and attitudes are much less unequivocal and often flawed, calling for further investigations in this field. Since one of the medical profession's arguments against euthanasia is its non-necessity, G.A. Kasting examines very carefully the actual practices and concludes that the argument is fallacious even in situations of highest-standard clinical care. G.S. Neeley examines the legal aspects of suicide, assisted and unassisted; the conclusion is that, in the U.S., suicide should be viewed as a constitutional right and, more generally and more

importantly, as a fundamental human right. "...The arguments opposing the legalization of suicide and physician aided death almost invariably hinge on... dogmatic pontifications regarding the unqualified immorality of any kind of elective death."

F.G. Miller and J.C. Fletcher state that the present cultural context in the U.S. favours the legalizing of euthanasia. They carefully define the terms and concepts of physician-assisted suicide and of physician-performed euthanasia, as applied to terminally ill patients and suggest that individual patient/physician decisions be reviewed by a committee.

D. Thomasma sums up the ethical pro and contra arguments. The discussion, says Thomasma, is made difficult by powerful political lobbies on both sides, in addition to religious (often militant) conservatism. Social climate and regulations strongly influence physicians behaviour, as shown on the example of Nazi physicians. Thomasma hints also (somewhat *con sordino*) at the "enormous power of the modern medical establishment over the lives and values of human beings", contested by patients' right movements, an issue the present reviewer considers, with Thomas Szasz (*The Theology of Medicine*, Oxford University Press, 1979) crucial to the whole debate. The book ends with an atypical case history analyzed by E. Schuster, raising some

wider issues and warning against "quick fix" solutions.

The book is a careful analysis of the difficult ethical question of the physician's role relate to dying. It is well documented, devoid of emotional involvement on the part of the authors; emphasis is on actual practices, logical analyses, and facts – wherever existing. The "slippery slope" argument turns up and is refused in most chapters; the dichotomy: medical establishment/public shows up, though covertly, at many places; and it is comforting to see that life and death both arise as a human right category.

To the feeling of a European reader, understandably, the book is slanted toward U.S. situations and perspectives, even though the Dutch example of liberalizing euthanasia is quoted repeatedly; nonetheless, it presents an excellent and recommendable review of this multifaceted and most timely ethical problem.

T. Strasser, Geneva

Bezahlte Laienhilfe und freiwillige Nachbarschaftshilfe

Meyer Peter C., Budowski Monika et al. (Hrsg.) 263 S., paperback. Seismo Verlag, Sozialwissenschaften und Gesellschaftsfragen. Zürich 1993. ISBN 3-908239-13-3

Ein Buch über Gesundheit im breiteren Sinn. Ein Buch ganz konkret über Selbsthilfe und Nachbarschaftshilfe, über bezahlte und freiwillige Laienhilfe. Ein Buch für den Praktiker des Sozial und Gesundheitswesens, den Sozialpolitiker und Sozialwissenschaftler. Ein Buch für den Laien von gegenüber, den Nachbarn von nebenan. Das Buch fasst Konzepte, Wirkungen und Förderungsmaßnahmen der Nachbarschaftshilfe kurz und doch sehr lehrreich zusammen. Welches sind

die Formen zwischenmenschlicher Hilfe? Wie organisiert sich die Nachbarschaftshilfe? Welches sind die Auswirkungen der Freiwilligenhilfe auf die Gesamtbevölkerung, auf die Helfenden und die Hilfeempfangenden. Wie, wo und wann soll und wird die Freiwilligenhilfe gefördert? Kurz, präzise, sachlich und fragstellend. Ausdehnend berichtet das Buch über zwei innovative Projekte, die sich auf die erwähnte Problematik beziehen: „*Bezahlte Laienhilfe*“ eine Dienstleistung

im Spitex-Zentrum Zürich-Albisried, und „*Nachbarschaftshilfe in einem Stadtquartier*“. Die Projekte sind sachlich beschrieben, mit Sorgfalt verglichen und immer wieder wird an theoretische Ansätze angeknüpft. Interessante Projekte. Sinnvolle Überlegungen. Vielleicht etwas lange. Interessantes und gutes Buch. Aber nicht ganz ohne Mühe erreicht man Seite 263, wo sich die multidisziplinär aufgestellte Autorengruppe vorstellt.

Ph. Chastonay, Genève

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