

BOOK REVIEWS

The Growth of Medical Knowledge, edited by HENK A. M. J. TEN HAVE, GERRIT K. KIMSMA and STUART F. SPICKER. *Philosophy and Medicine*, Vol. 36. Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht, 1990. viii + 196 pp.

The European Society of Philosophy of Medicine and Health Care (ESPMH) was founded in Maastricht, The Netherlands, in 1987. The occasion was marked by a conference on the growth of medical knowledge and its effect on the practice of medicine. Most of the chapters of this book derive from papers presented at the conference.

The first section of the book deals with medicine and culture. Medicine, the first author argues, may be viewed as just one expression of history and culture. The interests of political and economic power groups are more decisive in determining how, if at all, medical knowledge is brought to bear on health problems than are medical and scientific validity. As medicine is (also) an applied science, the effectivity, more than the truth, of medical knowledge was important for its growth. The controversy between theoretical (clinical) and applied science is further explored throughout the book. The ideas of Kuhn, Foucault and Fleck about growth of knowledge are outlined as frames of reference for examining the growth of medical knowledge.

In the second section ('Philosophy of science and the growth of medical knowledge') the authors elaborate on this subject. The expansion of medical knowledge is dependent on its culture acceptance. In other words ethical (or anthropological) criteria rather than epistemological are used to determine the growth of medical knowledge. Assessing this growth is not an easy task as medical knowledge nowadays consists of five sorts of knowledge: biological, clinical, hermeneutic (or humanistic) and knowledge of ethics and health economics. The growth of knowledge about causes of death is subject of research in one of the chapters.

The last section deals with the image of man in medicine. The anthropological and psychological side of medicine receive attention. The controversy between the anthropological and the clinical orientation in medicine is viewed as the same as the contrast between theory and practice. An

ongoing focus on clinical orientation has led to medicine seeming to offer the prospect of virtual immortality and to its becoming a substitute for religious authority. The author of the last paper states that if we do not want to become totally dependent on medicine, we should pay more attention to the patient and his or her experience in body and mind.

I did not find the book terribly well structured. After re-reading, I still feel, although less strongly, that the editors could have paid more attention to the continuity between chapters in each section, and especially between the sections. A concluding chapter would also have been very helpful.

The authors of the introduction pose the central question as to how medicine's recently-acquired power and effectiveness became established. The volume addresses this central question from various perspectives (p. 10). I found this 'central' question rather misleading. It suggests that the book is about the history of medicine and the importance of medicine to our (western) society. After reading it all, I think it is in some respects about the growth of medical knowledge, about the philosophy of medicine and also about the philosophy of the growth of (medical) knowledge. The controversy between the anthropological and epistemological orientation in medicine seems important to the growth of medicine. Perhaps this controversy could have been the central topic of the book, since it is present in all the chapters. Whatever the central question may be, the book is certainly worthwhile and (most chapters are easy to read). Virtually all authors enliven their theories with examples of diseases and research topics which make the book very interesting for those concerned with medical science rather than philosophy. I recommend this book to anyone interested in philosophy and growth of medical knowledge and particularly to students of medicine.

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Social Work Theory and Practice with the Terminally Ill, by JOAN PARRY. The Haworth Press, 1989. 300 pp. \$27.95.

This book provides an unpretentious, carefully planned examination of social work with terminally ill people and as such is a pleasure to read. The author presents social work in this field as an extension of the work in which social workers are involved, whoever they work with. Thus she states:

The skills needed to work with the dying patient and family are not very different from skills used to intervene with any client system. It is important to be open, accepting and available. The needs, yearnings, and problems are common to all clients, although some of their needs are peculiar to an awareness of the impending death [p. 61].

The scene is set with three interesting chapters.

The first describes the current situation in the U.S.A. in terms of attitudes and the institutional characteristics of some of the settings in which people die. This initial chapter goes on to present an ideal model for the institutional care of the terminally ill to include five elements: (1) open communication, (2) flexible facilities, (3) patient/family as a unit of care, (4) symptom control, (5) interdisciplinary team, seeing the hospice movement as an example of a setting in which these elements are put into practice.

The second chapter entitled 'Defining terminal illness' actually does both more and less than this. In this chapter, Parry presents "a theoretical under-pinning" from which subsequent discussion can take place. She stresses that terminal illness is a *process* which happens to a living individual, emphasising both the words living and individual throughout the book. She introduces the concept of life threatening illness, which I have always preferred to terminal illness.