

## Reviews

*Death, Dying, and the Biological Revolution: Our Last Quest for Responsibility.* By ROBERT M. VEATCH. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976. 323 pages. \$12.95.

This is no ordinary book on the psychology and sociology of dying or the theology of death; it is rather a first-rate philosophical and ethical inquiry into the meaning and moral significance of death and dying within the context of modern scientific and technological medicine.

Its author, Robert M. Veatch (director of the research group on death and dying at the Hastings Center), argues that death and dying represent "our last quest for responsibility." Seen only within the context of the biological revolution, this claim may seem obvious and perhaps trivial, but Veatch has additionally in mind a theme not mentioned in the title. Not only do the vastly increased possibilities for control of life and death—what he means by the "biological revolution"—imply basic ethical problems, but also these problems occur within a specific value framework. This framework is the "social revolution" which gave rise to our current attitudes toward personal freedom and the right of individuals. It is within the context of this social value framework that the power of scientific medicine over death and dying is engaged. "This book should be seen then, in relation to these twin revolutions, the biological and the social. Death is of interest in part because it offers man—the ordinary man—his last chance to express his human potential to determine his own destiny" (p. 17).

Veatch thus charts the issues involving death and dying on the axes of modern scientific medicine and of individual rights and personal freedom. The hallmark of the book is the way in which these twin concerns are kept in focus. There is a comfortable mixture of analysis and argumentation on the one hand and case discussion and illustration on the other. For instance, we are reminded constantly that the conceptual and operational aspects of the definitions of (whole) brain and cerebral death arise within the context of clinical medicine where individual cases and individual rights are at stake. Available policy options are mapped in the same way on both axes.

Veatch argues that the biological revolution has placed enormous powers in the hands of medical specialists. While these powers arise from science and technology, their control must be sought elsewhere. At stake is the preservation of the fundamental sense of human worth and responsibility in the context of these novel capabilities, not the mere opposition of personal freedom to technological control. Veatch is careful not only to avoid the slogans of euthanasia, death with dignity, and natural death but also to subject these highly ambiguous notions to sophisticated scrutiny. For instance, he avoids the term euthanasia. In its place he provides a full analysis of a moral valence

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of notions such as killing and allowing to die, reasonable and unreasonable treatment, and allowing to live versus allowing to die. In doing so he gives a rather full account of the ethical and legal notions of the right to refuse treatment in the case of competent adults, children, and incompetent adults. Finally he considers the policy options—given the capacities of modern technology—for dying morally; he appeals throughout this discussion to the notion that individual rights and personal freedom rather than professional prerogatives must be preserved and in doing so sets out the factors which limit or constrain professional responsibility.

While Veatch's discussion of these themes is very good, his reflection on the newly dead and the relation of natural death and public policy is outstanding. Here Veatch addresses a profoundly philosophical theme. He argues that we should think not so much about individual rights or freedom as about our moral obligations or responsibility to the dying patient and the newly dead. The fundamental concern then is seen to center on the notions of responsibility and the nature of responsible action under the clinical "condition of doubt." Decisions in the context where knowledge is uncertain are really not matters of either technical expertise or individual caprice but rather involve choices between various particular value considerations and general value frameworks, for example, ethics of individual freedom and technological and scientific activism.

As in his other works Veatch shows that biomedical ethics is not simply the ethical solution of medical problems but rather a field of options to be made explicit before recommendations can be put forth fairly. This means that a broad approach is required to sort out relevant factors. In this regard *Death, Dying, and the Biological Revolution* is to be highly recommended. Veatch's concern (and the leitmotif of the book) is the sense of responsibility appropriate to the modern setting of clinical medicine. This enables a very sophisticated yet entirely accessible discussion of the ethics of death and dying. Veatch's book is genuinely profound and suggestive and a welcome contribution to the literature, and in view of its subtitle one only hopes it is not his final explanation of the nature of responsibility.

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*The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi.* By RICHARD GELWICK. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. 181 pages. \$12.95.

I had a professor who used to chide us students for trying to swallow a subject whole instead of moving from the beginning toward the center. He said we reminded him of little boys in a hurry to eat a peanut-butter sandwich. This upbraiding always has seemed more or less appropriate with respect to subjects such as Hebrew, physics, and logic, but it is decidedly out of place in relation to those topics which seem to have no beginning. The thought of Michael Polanyi is one such topic.

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Comes now Richard Gelwick with a basic introduction to Polanyi's thought. At first I was skeptical about such an endeavor, but Gelwick has chosen the ingenious tack of introducing Polanyi's insights by tracing them within the development of his diversified yet synergetic career as a thinker. By and large Gelwick manages his peanut-butter sandwich; yet there remains a sticky spot or two.

The introduction to the book sets forth the basic themes of Polanyi's writings: (1) We are living in a crisis of civilized culture; (2) we need a basis of belief upon which we can act; (3) we need grounds for hope consonant with science and rational understanding; (4) there is a growing interest in developing a "postcritical philosophy" among thinkers in a wide variety of fields; (5) discovery and interdisciplinary integration are important to such a philosophy; and (6) the "cult of objectivity" is crucial to the character of our current crisis.

The starting point (chaps. 1-2) in Gelwick's presentation is Polanyi's encounter as a scientist with the "moral inversion" embodied in Soviet ideology. The coupling of "scientific objectivism," which claims not to traffic in "values," with the passionate demand for moral reform produces a self-destructive totalitarianism. Drawing on his experience in science, Polanyi concludes that this suicidal tendency can be overcome only by affirming our own personal involvement in knowing and being. As summed up by Gelwick, ". . . we have to believe in the value and power of ideals that are traditional and transcendent. These are values we know but cannot fully define or objectify. Truth, beauty, justice, love, and honor are such ideals. The notion of the objective ideal reduces them to petty and pedestrian proportions" (pp. 12-13). Polanyi contends that the practice of the scientific method—as opposed to the "official account" of its nature—implicitly affirms these values.

From here Gelwick traces Polanyi's career as expressed in his major writings, discussing in some detail his central notions of "tacit knowing" (chap. 3), the "stratified universe" (chap. 4), and the "society of explorers" (chap. 5). In chapter 5 he also presents some of the work being done by a variety of thinkers to incorporate Polanyi's insights into their various disciplines. The book concludes (chap. 6) with a summary of the ways in which Polanyi's thought addresses itself to the themes set out in the introduction; there is a ground for hope for our culture if we can set aside our dichotomized way of thinking and living by reaffirming our commitment to the open-ended exploration of transcendent values.

With specific reference to Polanyi's understanding of science Gelwick has focused well on the central notion of discovery and has sketched out in a helpful manner its ramifications for the cult of objectivity. The connections between Polanyi's work and that of N. R. Hanson and Thomas S. Kuhn are brought out adequately. Unfortunately nothing is said about the similarities with and about Polanyi's acknowledged indebtedness to the work of M. Merleau-Ponty. In many ways Polanyi can be understood as providing the distinctions and vocabulary necessary to a schematization of the diverse insights of the phenomenological movement in general and Merleau-Ponty's understanding of understanding in particular.

Although his ideas on the humanities are replete with insights worthy of exploration, Polanyi's discussions of art, literature, and religion, especially as found in his last book, *Meaning*, are a little "strained." Specifically the treatment of religion tends to be on the sociocultural level exclusively, with little

attention given to either theology or the dynamics of individual faith. This is not reflected in Gelwick's presentation, and perhaps that is as it should be in an introduction.

*Way of Discovery* is a sound and helpful introduction to Polanyi's profound and complex thought. It is accurate, sympathetic, clearly expressed, and well organized. Rather than recommend that one read Gelwick first and Polanyi next, I should think it best to read them side by side, following Gelwick's tracing of Polanyi's career. At the same time it must be said that Gelwick neither points out the frequent conflicts that arise among Polanyi's interpreters nor raises any criticisms of his own. Such issues might serve as additional points of entry into the Polanyian mode of thought.

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