**Book Review**

**Title:** Cochlear Implants in Children: Ethics and Choices

**Authors:** John B. Christiansen & Irene W. Leigh

**Publisher:** Gallaudet University Press, 2002

**Cost:** $49.95, hardcover

**ISBN:** 1-56368-116-1

**Title:** Ethics in Mental Health and Deafness

**Author:** Virginia Gutman (editor)

**Publisher:** Gallaudet University Press, 2002

**Cost:** $65.00, hardcover

**ISBN:** 1-56368-120-X

**Reviewer:** Simo Vehmas

These two recent books treat ethical issues of immense importance related to working with deaf

clients in mental health practice, and to the facts and controversies associated with cochlear

implants. The titles of these books may be misleading though since the actual ethical discussion

found in these books is scarce and shallow. The focus regarding ethics in these books is very

practical. They deal with issues that professionals, parents and deaf people themselves may confront

in different stages of life. In both books the ethics part is more an introduction to various ethical

questions, rather than scrutinizing them and finding sound bases for ethical judgments.

The authors do not discuss the issues philosophically. Gutman, for example, mentions in Ethics in

Mental Health and Deafness, that her focus is not on providing the “right answers” but on helping

readers ask the right questions leading to ethically sound clinical decisions (p. 12). This may reflect

a conscious methodological approach to examining ethics where the point is to enlighten moral

philosophical reasoning to people unfamiliar with it. But presenting questions in itself is not very

helpful if they are not discussed properly. To help readers make their own conclusions, one should

provide them with arguments of the strengths and weaknesses of various possible normative

judgments. In this sense, the ethical argument in Ethics in Mental Health and Deafness seems to

cease before it has even properly begun.

Christiansen and Leigh fortunately present the ethical dimensions related to cochlear implants in a

more versatile manner. They provide readers with at least one possible tool for solving ethical

problems: the four-principles approach developed by Tom Beauchamp and James Childress.

However, the principles of autonomy, justice, beneficence and nonmaleficence do not in any manner

constitute an unproblematic, indisputable foundation for resolving ethical dilemmas. The theory of

four principles has been strongly criticized. Whether one finds it plausible is not the issue. The ideal

in books like Cochlear Implants in Children is to give readers alternative ways to solve ethical

issues. When only one philosophical tool is presented, the ethical reasoning is limited.

Thus, from the viewpoint of philosophical ethics, these books do not seem to have too much to

offer. However, one crucial element in applied ethics is the consideration of empirical knowledge.

The use of empirical data gives a framework to the normative arguments and directs the conclusions.

In this sense, these books provide some invaluable material to both academics and lay people. Many

academics and professionals may not have even thought about many of the issues related to cochlear

implants, deaf people in mental health care, the Deaf culture and so on. Regarding the awareness of

the ethical issues related to deafness, these books give a useful overview of the field (this applies

especially to Cochlear Implants in Children). Since many professionals, like the general public, do

not have much time for complicated philosophical arguments, these books may be very useful to

parents and professionals who have not encountered deafness and the related ethical issues.

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