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Values in Health Care: Choices and Conflicts / A Question of Values: Six Ways We Make the Personal Choices that Shape our Lives

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At first, sharing a term in the title appears to be the major commonality of these two very different books. *A Question of Values* is in the mode of self-help and personal exploration with an easy-going style; *Values in Health Care* is decidedly academic and text-bookish. But a closer look finds more similarities such as a penchant for “say what you want to say, say it, and say what you said.” On a more meaningful level, both have potential relevance for applied sociologists willing to pick and choose from the two different styles in order to answer practical questions.

In *A Question of Values*, the author’s approach is appealing for a wide range of readers (with endorsement by Scott Peck) as it defines six basic types of value systems: authority, logic, sense experience, emotion, intuition, and “science” (quotation marks are those of Lewis). Each source of values and personal choices gets a chapter. Case studies of how well-known individuals (Barth, Einstein, Gandhi, Meir) have exemplified or combined a value system is helpful in modeling an analysis of values as played out in writing and action. The chapter on values in the classroom (all levels of moral education) is used as an example of how Lewis’s paradigm can be applied to social issues. A “How to Read this Book” section is a useful way for readers to sample the issues without becoming bogged down in a search through the Index for a unified topic. There is a certain amount of science-bashing in which the author is heavy on psychological systems of authority. Sociologists will note that “scientific” attention to the larger perspective, as opposed to individually-based disciplines like psychology, is called “socio-demo-anthro-eco-techno model building” (no citation). Luckily, this discussion is brief.

For sociologists in a practice setting, introspection on personal values may clarify an individual practitioner’s approach to applied problem-solving while the
use of value clarification to examine social issues also has relevance for academic sociology.

In contrast to Lewis’s breadth and breeziness, Bruhn and Henderson are highly focused on values related to health care and the book is written specifically for teaching health care professionals. A sense of urgency pervades the well-documented chapters, evoking for values an importance to equal or rival the clinical chorus and treatment plans which dominate medical training. The chapters are carefully crafted in parallel presentations so that values related to health, prevention, normalcy, religious beliefs, pain, and choices each begins with a witty quotation, marches through definitions, classical references and scientific studies, current issues, and professional implications. Each chapter concludes with numerous and rich medical references and a list of suggested further reading. The chapter on pain and suffering carries a message of concern for patients as more than cases, using both scientific data and the popular press as justification.

Despite—or because of—the medical school orientation, the book does not idealize physicians or glorify new technologies. For example, although the treatment of health and religious values too-glibly summarizes American ethnic minority populations, it also urges respect for traditional beliefs and points out the pitfalls of ignoring ethnic differences in every-day medical care. “Healing” as a value, however, is carefully separated from “helping” in the medical model tradition of physicians as distinct from others.

Appendices, which include documents from the Hippocratic oath to Roe vs. Wade are themselves a fascinating revelation of contemporary medical practices and how a profession defines itself. A sociological distinction between sociology “in” and sociology “of” medicine can be seen in the chapters discussing real-life choices related to truth-telling to patients, health promotion and in the numerous times abortion, AIDS, and the “right to die” are examined. The weakness of such a densely written volume is that the reader is buffeted by an almost forced attention to “on the one hand . . . , and on the other . . . ” The authors’ own values and opinions are reserved for exhortations on professional integrity rather than issues.

It is undoubtedly my training in academic and practice sociology that leads me to read these books looking for sociological applications (are we desperate?). None of the authors would accept the idea of a “value-free” science although they struggle objectively to identify assumptions that influence choices both scientific and personal. In that mode, the contribution of these works is not so much in exposure
to the possibility of narrow and rigid opinions that will result in unexamined choices (we already know that) but in the "value" of solving problems through an analysis that finds solutions from equally-weighted different approaches.

My advice? Grab Lewis for the next plane trip and keep Bruhn and Henderson with its rich references on a nearby shelf!


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This is a compendium of specialist surveys of varied religions—Assemblies of God, Baha'í, Baptist, Buddhist, Churches of Christ, Mormon, Hindu, Islam, Judaism, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Unitarian, and Methodist—with attention to their perspectives on death. The editors describe their analytic interests in an introduction and conclusion.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data show that *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife* is a reprint of *Encounters with Eternity* (1986). As a consequence, this book is not as clearly focused as its title suggests. Although each religion needs general description, in order to put views on death in perspective, the end result is encyclopedic rather than thematic.

The arrangement of chapters also detracts from the central topic of contrasting beliefs. The editors describe their selected religions as falling into three groups—"America's most heavily populated organized Christian denominations; smaller but rapidly growing or sociologically and theologically interesting Christian groups; and the largest non-Christian denominations represented in American society" (p. 12)—but arrange their chapters in alphabetical order. Although objective, systematic orderliness may enhance quick-and-easy reference usefulness, it offers no substantive guide to readers. This book would have been more comprehensible if the editors had grouped religions according to similarities or contrasts in belief and practices, or had placed their chapters in thematic sections with formal introductions.

*How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife* could be used as a resource text for undergraduate, graduate, or professional courses which examine the influence of religious beliefs on qualities of life and death. However, in spite of its