

Books

Doctors' Dilemmas: Moral Conflict and Medical Care, by Samuel Gorovitz. Macmillan (New York, 1982). 225 pp., \$14.95.

By James Childress

Prof. Gorovitz, chairman of the philosophy department of the University of Maryland, takes up ethical problems in medicine with the conviction that "philosophy can help us all deal with them." Inviting the "non-professional general reader" to be a part of his audience as he wields "applied philosophy" Gorovitz makes it easier for amateurs by utilizing dialogue and citing numerous examples.

His approach is deliberately provocative. "Moral Mayhem in Modern Medicine," for instance, is the title of his first chapter. That title is a reference to his belief that a violation of the integrity of the person represents "moral mayhem." This misdeed, in his terms, is an action that abuses a person in a way that will not bear scrutiny, that has no adequate justification and that is morally indefensible.

Gorovitz claims that modern medicine "abound with such actions." In support of this he cites several instances, including some drawn from his own experience. I suspect that many readers will respond that the actions referred to involved bad medical practice rather than moral dilemmas in which reasons can be given for and against a procedure.

His emphasis on abuse and lack of justification in examining medical practices stems from his contention that our pluralistic culture is not as fragmented as some scholars assert. Gorovitz argues that there are "common

moral denominators" of equality and respect for persons.

He goes on to say that "philosophical inquiry into the reasons behind conflicting moral judgments can facilitate resolution of the conflict by placing those reasons in the broader context of shared values." This conviction gives rise to what he calls "a strain of optimism" which runs throughout his book.

Turning to the resolution of disputes about right action in quandries of medicine, Gorovitz deals in the first part of his volume with topics such as medical mistakes, informed consent and patient autonomy, and illness, life and the good patient.

In the second part he considers moral decisions, conflicts and choices. He also addresses the unavoidability of values in medical practice and ways to resolve moral conflict. Good doctors, public policy, dying and reproduction are the subjects of the third part. The final section, which consists of one chapter, sets forth Gorovitz' "last thoughts."

Whether he is describing puzzling aspects of medicine, tracing the source of philosophy to wonder, or analyzing moral judgments, the author always writes lucidly and in a style which evokes interest.

If medical practitioners can overcome their initial shock and read to the end of this work, they will find, along with the amateurs, much in it that is interesting and instructive.

(Childress is a professor of religious studies and medical ethics at the University of Virginia and the author of several books and articles on biomedical ethics.)



Disarming

Debbie Sigrist (left), a member of Catholics Against Nuclear Arms (CANAs), and Sister Chris Wagner, SSJ, member of the Rochester diocesan Task Force on Nuclear Disarmament, look over the shoulder of Richard Rosen of Temple Sinai. The three are on the planning committee for the Genesee/Finger Lakes Nuclear Disarmament Network, which is organizing a benefit showing of the film, "The Atomic Cafe," 7:15 and 9:20 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 30, at the Little Theatre, 240 East Ave. Tickets may be purchased only in advance, and are obtained by contacting Nancy Eckerson Fitts, 89 S. Main St., Pittsford, N.Y. 14534; (716) 586-1936.

'Joni' Flawed but Quite Special

By Michael Gallagher

At the beginning of the summer of 1968, 18-year-old Joni Eareckson's life could hardly have looked brighter or more promising. Beautiful, popular, talented, a superb athlete and horse-woman, she had just graduated from high school in Woodlawn, a prosperous suburb of Baltimore.

A happy, if ordinary, future seemed to be opening up, hers for the taking, when one hot summer day a

month after graduation, she dove off a raft in Chesapeake Bay. Her head struck something solid, and everything was irrevocably changed.

Joni Eareckson became a paraplegic, doomed to a wheelchair for the rest of her life, able only after weeks and months of gruelling effort to regain some limited movement in her arms and in her neck.

"Joni" (World Wide Picture) is Joni Eareckson's

story, and it's a story that's something more than the familiar, if always inspiring, account of triumph over adversity that we've seen in movies time and time again, most notably in "The Other Side of the Mountain," the film biography of the courageous skier Jill Kinmont.

Joni, talented at sketching before her accident, learns to paint again and soon surpasses her earlier efforts to become an acclaimed artist. But, far more significant than this victory, Joni, who had always been a believing Christian but for whom religion was just another aspect of her life, undergoes a conversion so thoroughgoing that she at last is able to tell a bitter young Marine officer, maimed in Vietnam, that she would rather be sitting in her wheelchair knowing Christ than be free of it not knowing him.

Not your ordinary commercial venture, "Joni" was made by World Wide Pictures, an organization dedicated to producing films imbued with the Christian message. The organization's most notable success before "Joni" was "The Hiding Place," a drama about Dutch Christians risking their lives to rescue Jews from the Nazis.

As a film, "Joni" is not without its flaws. Writer-director James F. Collier's script is a little too cryptic in its exploration of some

crucial relationships, a shortcoming aggravated by his fondness, especially in the early portion of the film, for extremely short scenes and abrupt cuts. Nor does the too-pretty, at times arty cinematography of Frank Raymond help matters. I could have done without such touches as the camera focusing on the spinning hubcap of a speeding ambulance and extended closeup of the driver and, later, of a nameless piano player.

All the faults of "Joni," however, including a conclusion that lays on the inspirational with too heavy a hand, pale into insignificance beside the incandescent performance that is the heart of the film: Miss Eareckson playing herself with the artless poise, warmth and intelligence that belong to an actress of just about perfect dramatic pitch, a purity of tone that is irresistible. A beautiful woman, Miss Eareckson is invariably convincing and moving. Because of her, "Joni" becomes something quite special indeed.

Her support, for the most part, is very good, especially Bert Remsem, who brings a warm, gritty integrity to the role of her father; Louise Hoven as Joni's best friend, who helps her face up to reality, and Katherine De Hetre, who, in the difficult role of Joni's sister, Jay, conveys, without having many lines, strength of character and deep compassion.

If we're Christians, we're not only supposed to believe in God, we're supposed to believe in his providence. We're supposed to believe that nothing that happens is random or meaningless. If 27-year-old Jean Donovan, a lay missionary, is murdered in El Salvador, there's a purpose behind it. If 17-year-old Joni Eareckson is crippled for life at 17, there's a purpose behind that too.

In the shocking aftermath of tragedy, however, trying to discern such purposes is not an easy matter. A film like "Joni," then, thanks to the wonderful Miss Eareckson, helps us all to believe that they indeed are there. And as for the parents

of teenagers, I urge you, instead of merely bewailing such trash as "Beach Girls," "Zapped," and "Fast Times at Ridgemont High," to get, by whatever legitimate means possible, your bewildering offspring to see "Joni."

The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified "Joni" A-1, general patronage, though there are some restrained but realistic hospital scenes in the earlier

sections that some parents might prefer their younger children not to see.

(Gallagher is a staffer with the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Communication. "Joni" is not in standard commercial distribution. Information on where and when it is being shown is available by writing World Wide Pictures, 1201 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis, Minn. 55403)



Joni Eareckson, star of the autobiographical film "Joni."

Sarah Child



All in the Family

One Vote For Ending NFL Strike

I once heard a story about this courageous woman. Her husband was a rabid football buff, and most of the time she just accepted the situation. Saturday afternoons, Monday nights and all the times in between.

Sometimes she served meals in front of the TV and other times she waited until the last game ended. Thanksgiving Day was always particularly hard as everybody expected to eat well but nobody wanted to leave the set and she refused to serve holiday meals on trays.

On this particular Thanksgiving Day she got up and began cooking for her family and relatives who would share the dinner. Alone in the kitchen she cooked and cooked and cooked.

By 9 a.m. she had the pies out of the oven and the turkey, stuffed, in. And she began on the vegetables and hot breads.

At 3 p.m. she warned the TV crowd that dinner would be served in one hour.

At 4 p.m. she announced that it was ready. As usual, came the delaying tactics. Every 15 minutes, she an-

nounced the condition of the turkey — cooling off, drying out, etc. No response.

At 5 p.m. she made one more announcement and, getting no feedback, she visited the tool box and, going into the living room, hammered the television screen into smithereens.

There have been days when I wished that I had that woman's strength of mind, so when I heard the NFL players had struck, a little happy feeling came over me.

It didn't last long. I began to remember all the years the head of the house had worked late afternoons and evenings on the morning paper and how good the TV sounded when he finally changed jobs.

I also thought about my Sunday naps. TV football is by far the most soothing sound to sleep to — much better than basketball (too fast) and golf (too slow).

And finally I thought about all the free time my husband would have if the NFL stayed struck all winter. For 19 years now he hasn't had time to notice that I do even less housework in the winter than I do in the summer.

Thus, I add my earnest plea to all the others. Come on, guys, get this thing straightened out!

Television of Note

Wednesday, Sept. 19 — "Life of the Party: The Story of Beatrice" (CBS)

Carol Burnett stars as a former alcoholic who founded the first recovery house for women alcoholics.

Based on a true story, the dramatization begins in a Los Angeles jail in 1943. Beatrice O'Reilly (Burnett) is bailed out of the drunk tank by her husband (Lloyd Bridges) and the next hour describes her slide into a drunken abyss from which she is rescued by Alcoholics Anonymous. Within five years and against some formidable opposition, she had begun her recovery house which has served as a model for many others around the country.

The program is indeed inspiring and Burnett does a fine job with her strong

role, even if bits of her Eunice character creep in occasionally. Directed by veteran Lamont Johnson, there can't help but be some genuine emotion in this story of a woman who overcomes her problems and then directs her energies toward helping others.

The subject of alcoholism, however, has been done too often by television for this drama to avoid the cliches and stereotypes of earlier efforts. Moreover, the narrative is too often a pedestrian chronicle of events, leaving too little time for more than a surface character study of an unusual individual.

For all that, its heart is in the right place and, though its message may border on a temperance lecture, there's nothing wrong with that.

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