

## Book Reviews

## THE FIX

By Michael Massing. 335 pp. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1999.  
\$25. ISBN 0-684-80960-5.

SUBSTANCE abuse is one of the most serious and debilitating yet treatable chronic diseases in the United States today. Use of illicit drugs alone is estimated to cause approximately 20,000 deaths per year. Fortunately, there is a large body of evidence that treatment for substance abuse and addiction is highly effective and that it can save lives and money. Furthermore, treatment has repeatedly been shown to be far more cost effective than legal measures in reducing drug consumption.

Given these facts, one might expect strong support for treatment among political leaders and the general public alike. Yet few issues generate more spirited debate than national drug-control policies. Too frequently, the result of such debate has been ever more strident calls for stricter laws and mandatory jail sentences for drug offenders and a relative devaluing of programs to prevent and treat drug abuse. A tragic consequence of this orientation is that addicts who want and need treatment are often unable to get it. Meanwhile, drug traffickers, lured by the huge profits that can be made in the illegal-drug trade, find ways to negotiate legal hurdles to replenish the drug pipeline. At the same time, our prison populations swell with drug offenders, who, in 1996, accounted for over 60 percent of federal prisoners.

Against this backdrop, Michael Massing, in his provocative and meticulously researched book, contrasts the reality of addiction to illegal drugs with the gyrations of U.S. drug policy, from the Nixon administration to the present. Along the way, he describes the tremendous barriers addicts who want treatment encounter when they try to obtain it. He also chronicles how U.S. drug policy has moved away from demand-reduction programs, which emphasize treatment for addicts, and toward law enforcement and interdiction of drugs at their source.

Massing's surprising conclusion is that we should adopt a national drug-control strategy similar to that which existed during the Nixon administration, when activities to reduce demand were considered to be at least as important as programs to reduce supply and were funded accordingly. Providing the reader with an engaging view of the inner workings of the Nixon White House, Massing describes how the Nixon administration — motivated by the need to deal with returning Vietnam veterans who were addicted to heroin and with violent crime in the nation's cities — enlisted the aid of Dr. Jerome Jaffe, one of the most respected specialists on addiction in the country. Dr. Jaffe quickly established a testing and treatment program for returning veterans as well as a national treatment network for drug addicts, which was similar to one he had established in Illinois. In short order, this initiative curtailed the heroin-addiction epidemic among returning Vietnam veterans and substantially reduced both waiting lists for drug treatment and crime rates throughout the United States.

Massing goes on to detail how, in the wake of the Watergate scandal and the subsequent resignation of Richard

Nixon and his senior staff, this treatment system was gradually dismantled as the nation's drug-control priorities tilted toward funding the "war on drugs." He particularly takes aim at the Office of National Drug Control Policy, characterizing it as ineffectual and blasting the succession of "drug czars" for their lack of experience in drug treatment.

The first-person accounts of drug addiction Massing provides are no less compelling than the historical account of drug-control policies in the United States. Through the real-life stories of individual drug addicts, who are guided through the maze of treatment options in and around New York City by dedicated and street-wise outreach workers, the reader can feel their growing sense of urgency and frustration as treatment slots fill and the window of opportunity for placing increasingly dysphoric addicts in a treatment program begins to close. The reader is also given an inside view of the devastating personal and social costs of drug addiction, including broken homes, addicted children, crime, unemployment, and wasted lives.

*The Fix* is not without its shortcomings. By emphasizing treatment for "chronic" drug addicts, Massing tends to underemphasize the roles of prevention and brief intervention programs for less severely addicted persons. Each of these approaches is critical if we are to reduce the impact of drug abuse and addiction on public health and the number of people who become severely addicted to illegal drugs. However, given his focus on reducing the social costs of drug addiction, including criminal activity, Massing's emphasis on treatment for severely addicted persons is not surprising or inappropriate. In addition, as Massing states, the book is based on "political and street reporting"; it is not a scientific work. As such, there is some risk of overgeneralization on the basis of the experience of the few persons profiled in the book. There is also a tendency to impute relations of cause and effect between, for example, the availability of drug treatment and crime rates, without considering other factors that could also influence this outcome.

Nonetheless, these shortcomings do not detract from a core message of the book: that we need to modify our national drug-control policies so that we can at least achieve parity in terms of funding between demand-reduction and supply-reduction programs. Were we to follow this wise counsel, there is ample evidence that we could reduce the personal and social costs of drug addiction and ensure that those who desperately need and want treatment services are able to receive them.

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## THE LIMITS OF PRIVACY

By Amitai Etzioni. 280 pp. New York, Basic Books, 1999. \$25.  
ISBN 0-465-04089-6.

EVERYONE knows — patients as well as doctors — that the confidentiality of medical records has virtually disappeared. Amitai Etzioni, a well-known social scientist, documents the violation of the privacy of medical records that occurs when unauthorized persons gain access to such

information in record rooms or on computers — what worries most people about the easy accessibility of their records. Of greater concern is that “most violations of the privacy of medical records are the result of [the] legally sanctioned . . . unconcealed, systematic flow of medical information . . . to non health-care parties including employers, marketers, and the press . . . the daily, continuous, and very numerous disclosures and uses that are legal but of highly questionable moral standing.” Concern about these intrusions has spurred attempts to make medical records more secure. It is important to take advantage of the convenience of computerized information handling without losing the privacy that goes with illegibly scribbled notes stored in a filing cabinet in a private office.

Etzioni acknowledges the need for solutions to the problem of the virtual transparency of medical records. But when our concern with privacy — our obsession, according to Etzioni — prevents the use of the results of testing for the human immunodeficiency virus for public health purposes, allows sex offenders to return to the community, prevents law-enforcement agencies (even those with warrants) from deciphering encrypted messages, and denies us the benefits of universal identification cards, then things have gone too far, damaging the common good. Etzioni identifies himself as a communitarian. Communitarianism has arisen in politics, ethics, and philosophy in response to what is seen as the excesses of the increasing individualism that marks this century, especially since World War II. (The entire October 17, 1999, issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, entitled “The Me Millennium,” was devoted to the subject.)

Nobody looking at the contemporary United States (and Europe) can fail to see evidence of the widespread concern with the self that is everywhere (for example, the overemphasis on the autonomy of patients in medicine). For some, it is a selfish “me, myself, and I-ism” that destroys the enduring values of community, whereas for others it is the blossoming of rational, self-determining, highly evolved individuals that is necessary for the progress of democracy. Like all major social changes, this recent surge of individualism takes many forms, produces excesses as well as benefits, and engenders countervailing forces. It cannot be otherwise.

The extreme concern with privacy seems to be one byproduct of this return to individualism. This is not so odd a reaction, since the private life as a respected and hidden domain disappeared in the 1960s. (Remember the slogan of that era announcing its demise: “The personal is the political.”) The ease with which private or personal information is made accessible through the universal use of computers feeds people’s worry.

Etzioni does a service by raising well-researched questions about privacy on both sides of the problem — that is, too little privacy as well as too much. It is the solutions he offers that are the issue. For example, no one is happy at the thought that sexual offenders who return anonymously to their communities after completing their sentences may strike again — the basis of so-called Megan’s laws. But I’m not sure many will subscribe to Etzioni’s solution: transferring these people after they have completed their prison terms to guarded villages “where they are allowed to lead normal lives aside from the requirement that they stay put.” Unfortunately, the author is not even-handed. Unhappy with what he believes is their faulty thinking, he dismisses some who disagree with his positions, particularly liberals and the American Civil Liberties Union, as being merely

self-serving and wrong-headed, instead of being clear-thinking, right-minded communitarians of his stripe. He brushes aside, not too politely (quoting, for example, a comment that Justice William O. Douglas’s reasoning provoked “not only giggles but guffaws” from Justice Arthur Goldberg’s clerks), the constitutional basis for privacy that characterized the famous rulings by the Supreme Court on reproductive choices in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972), and *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

For Etzioni, privacy is not a right, but “a societal license that exempts a category of acts from . . . communal, public, and government scrutiny.” Privacy also encompasses behavior that is expected, even required, to remain private — for example, activities that take place in the bathroom or bedroom. Here, also, society defines situations in which privacy is required and when it may be invaded, and such definitions may vary from community to community.

The definition of privacy he advances reflects the thinking of “responsive (or new) communitarianism . . . [which] seeks to balance individual rights with social responsibility, and individuality with community.” Who doesn’t seek such a balance? The problem lies in the question of who will define the proper balance. No one likes social excess, whether it comes from radical individualism or an imperious community. In times of social change, it is the very definition of excess that is up for grabs. Why stop at privacy? Why not, for example, curtail freedom of speech because pornography has gone too far in the media and on the Internet and threatens the community’s children? There is widespread feeling that social responsibility has been impoverished — not only by individualism, but also by forces of the marketplace — and that a sense of common cause is lacking in many contemporary human enterprises, not the least of which is medicine. Is the solution a new, legislating communitarianism? At the end of this book, I remained unconvinced. Or, as I believe, is Etzioni’s book itself evidence of the inevitable countervailing forces that always arise when social change has gone too far?

As for restoring the confidentiality of medical records, it is not rampant individualism that requires restraint but, rather, the power of commercially driven interests that prevent adequate protective legislation from being enacted.

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#### NOVEL ASPECTS OF PAIN MANAGEMENT: OPIOIDS AND BEYOND

Edited by Jana Sawynok and Alan Cowan. 373 pp., illustrated.  
New York, Wiley, 1999. \$119.95. ISBN 0-471-18017-3.

THE goals of *Novel Aspects of Pain Management* are to provide historical background and a panoramic view of the chemicals that influence pain and to assess the therapeutic potential of many classes of such agents. The book is addressed to academic and pharmaceutical scientists and clinicians seeking new means of pain control. Most of the chapters are informative; they are generally well written and