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EDITOR'S CHOICE

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Just because the autumn book supplement opens with a review of Colin Douglas's latest satire on the Edinburgh medical establishment (p 1072) and ends with a "gloomiad" about the motor car (p 1079) don't think it's all a soft read. Andrew Herxheimer, for example, concedes social historian E Richards's thesis that therapeutic evaluation is inherently a social and political process but dismisses as depressingly mushy her advocacy of "the sociopolitical appraisal of therapies" (p 1076). A tougher alternative for therapeutic evaluation is advanced by Ben Mead and Chris Williams: they want the testing of the comparative efficacy of drugs to be taken out of the hands of the pharmaceutical companies to remove the commercial

pressures of the current process (p 1005). That the commercial pressures aren't only one sided is illustrated in John Marley's personal view on lost illusions (p 1071). A tougher approach is also advocated by Tony Delamothe in his response to *The Health of the Nation*—this time to poverty and health inequalities (p 1046). Tackling the issue of income distribution would be hard—but no harder than tackling the rationing of health care, which is already upon us. In their account of a rationing exercise conducted by Southampton Health Authority (p 1039) Murray Cochrane and colleagues describe the difficulties faced by the authority—not least the lack of firm evidence on the effectiveness of most treatments.