then the madness provides an excuse.

Ms Radden describes the case of a sniper who shot many people from the tower of the University of Texas before being killed by the police. At autopsy he was found to have a brain tumour. Suppose that the tumour caused the sniper to hate people. Ms Radden believes that we would want to excuse the sniper on the grounds that although he may be able to give reasons for why he acted in that way (for example his hatred of people), he would be ignorant of his real reason for so acting (his tumour). On her view it is the ignorance of this real reason that is at the root of our excusing him.

But do any of us know the real reasons why we act as we do? Am I writing this because I like to think about philosophy, or to please the editor or because of a particular configuration of the chemicals and connections in my brain? Why does the brain tumour excuse, but my brain state does not? I suspect that we can only give an adequate answer in terms of an account of mental illness. The sniper is ill and I am not.

If this is true it undermines Ms Radden's position, because it would make her analysis of ignorance dependent on an analysis of illness. But her whole enterprise is to account for the excusing effect of madness without recourse to the concept of illness.

The same criticism can be made for the other pillar of her edifice: compulsion. If we are to say that one act is compelled by a person's mental state, but that another is not, we need to give an account of human action which can locate the essential difference. It is difficult to see how this could be done without involving the concept of illness.

My own belief, which I have come to only by reading this book, is that we must account for why madness may excuse wrongdoing through an analysis of madness as illness. This is the position which Ms Radden is out to attack. As in most good books on philosophy I found the examples more powerful than the arguments.

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Medical Ethics in Antiquity – Philosophical Perspectives on Abortion and Euthanasia


Why bother to explore the origins of Western medical ethics? With the pressing and complex problems of bioethics today ‘who can afford the luxury of mounting the carousel of history for yet another ride full circle from past to present?’ Having moved adductively through Carrick’s study, I appreciate the vigour of his response: ‘Who can afford not to?’ Carrick writes his philosophical history with a style that engages the reader in a dialogue with Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Galen and Seneca. More provocative is the search for the real Hippocrates whose identity is not yet established by historical evidence.

The social and scientific setting of Greek medicine is explored with two central questions asked: what scientific, socio-economic, religious and moral constraints did the average fifth or fourth century BC Greek physician experience in his daily practice of medicine and how did these factors shape his attitudes and conduct towards his patients and towards his community? Carrick does not just trip lightly over a plethora of mute historical facts; rather he unravels with rigour the presuppositions for ancient Greek and Roman beliefs about euthanasia, abortion and infanticide. The challenge to the reader is temporarily to adopt ‘a fresh conceptual orientation to fully penetrate the logic of the pagan mind’ on these issues. In recognising the multiple social, cultural, and religious factors forming the beliefs of the ancients, the contemporary reader can begin more assiduously to appreciate the complexity in the formation of moral beliefs in medicine.

Carrick is intent on dispelling some prevalent myths about the ancients particularly the myths of moral uniformity among ancient physicians, the myth of dedication to the imperatives of the Hippocratic Oath and the myth that physicians constituted an elite professional group looked on with admiration by Greek and Roman lay persons. The reader is confronted with a picture of philosophical pluralism in ancient Greece and Rome. The positions of Pythagoreans are starkly contrasted with those of Plato, Aristotle and Seneca on issues of abortion and euthanasia. Ancient texts are shown to provide a diverse range of publicly admitted reasons for the justification of either infanticide or abortion which make contemporary debates about either infanticide or abortion seem timid by comparison! The average Greek physician probably did not swear to uphold the famous Oath of Hippocrates. ‘He may never have even heard of it!’ For those sceptical of such debunking, Carrick is skilled and sensitive at showing how the process of unmasking illusions about the past is a necessary step to intellectual liberation. In the domain of medical ethics today it becomes a form of evasion to continue believing that a long revered Hippocratic tradition of medicine and ethics has been supplanted by a slipshod pluralism of the late 20th century. Misleading arguments by authorities based on alleged ancient medical tradition need exposing. A sense of confidence emerges in contemporary efforts more honestly to appraise our ethical ancestry. Carrick’s final message may well be that there is wisdom to be found in the ancients and applied to the present but it is not the comfortable wisdom that for too long we have been taught.

Why Won’t They Talk to me?

Linward Productions Limited, PO Box 63, Shepperton Studio Centre, Studios Rd, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 0QD.

£295 + VAT per set of five videos each lasting about 25 minutes.

This set of five video programmes sets out to improve communications between those who are seriously ill and dying and their carers, particularly doctors, medical students, nurses and social workers. The series demonstrates good and bad ways of talking with patients, using the skills of a group of actors who have been specially trained to recreate the emotions and reactions of patients facing serious illness. The presenters are Dr Rob Buckman, a consultant medical oncologist and also well known as a television wit, and Dr Peter Maguire, a consultant psychiatrist, whose special interest is communication skills in patient care.

Abortion: Medical Progress and Social Implications


‘The need to check the unlimited growth of the world’s population has been accepted by most responsible authorities . . .’. So states David Baird in his introduction to the papers which form the basis of the Ciba symposium on abortion. If one accepts his first statement without enquiring as to what constitutes a responsible authority or whether there is any evidence that unlimited growth of the world’s population is indeed the actual consequence if birth control methods