

Philosophy and Medical Welfare

Edited by J M Bell and Susan Mendus, 126 pages, Cambridge, £8.95, Cambridge University Press, 1988

This slim volume is very well worth reading. It stems from a Royal Institute of Philosophy Conference held at York in September 1987. Inevitably, as with all conference books, there is some unevenness among the contributions, and some lack of unity. Nevertheless in this instance quality, readability and relevance never fall below an acceptable level.

Not surprisingly, Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs) attract a good deal of attention in the book. Four of the seven essays in one way or another address them. Since the authors include Alan Williams (one of the principal architects of the notion) and John Harris (its sharpest critic), the reader is assured of a diversity of views, all of them worth serious attention. Fortunately, Alan Williams does not simply go over the familiar ground of explaining QALYs and arguing the case for them, but describes a survey aimed at eliciting views about the importance of help at one stage of life compared with others. Thus he is not concerned in this essay with preferences about relative states of health – various degrees of pain and handicap compared with feeling well – but with public views about the relative importance of helping infants (for example) compared with people who are looking after elderly relatives, or parents bringing up children. This is a well written account of an inquiry, with a touch of the detective story. He does not seek to justify it, nor explain how he intends to use the results, but it is not hard to guess.

Nor is it difficult to predict that John Harris will view any such enterprise with horror. What he does in this volume, with eloquence and no concessions whatever to the economists, is to argue for the superiority of the equality principle over any notion of cost benefit. He cheats a little by exaggeration. For example, 'if you and I are different ages but both want to live, then it is unfair to prefer your life to mine simply because you are three months younger'. A three-month difference is one thing, but what if the difference in life expectancy is ten years or twenty or thirty? He would do better to concentrate on these more substantial and difficult choices than to

over intrusive therapies, mechanical ventilation or resuscitation; and finally, discusses the ethical dimensions of the duty to inform others. William J Winslade argues firmly that risk-carriers, and if not them, their doctors, have compelling responsibility to inform others who have been put at risk.

The final section discusses from various perspectives the many issues which AIDS has raised for public health policy. Mandatory screening, contact tracing and quarantine make their appearance, along with the questions of discrimination in employment, in the armed forces, and over insurance. The most telling contribution in this section is from the San Francisco epidemiologist Andrew Moss, who details some of the ethical and moral choices which arose in practice over the closure of the gay bathhouses in that city. Moss, who supported the closure, argues that an aggressive voluntary public health policy must be developed in order to prevent the rise of 'new right' coercive solutions.

Moss's contribution is interesting as an historical account by a key participant in the San Francisco AIDS story. The problem with the rest of the book is two-fold. Much of the material it presents is, in AIDS terms, quite dated. It is also entirely American-focused. The issues raised are universal but the empirical material presented is specific to one country. And in the US, as in other countries, much has happened since 1986 which has implications for the ethical, as well as other, dimensions of the disease.

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The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain and Science

Bernard E Rollin, xviii + 308 pages, Oxford, £17.50, Oxford University Press, 1989

The main premise of this book is that, while commonsense should have us recognise that animals can think, feel

and suffer, scientists have long denied that we can know what animals are experiencing. This has led to a cavalier attitude towards animal use, animal pain and the moral questions that they raise. As a result, it is not only the animals used in scientific research which have suffered, but also science itself, because failure to pay sufficient attention to animal feelings can distort the results of the experiments in which they are used. Happily, increased societal concern about animals, not least in the scientific community itself, at least in some parts of the world, is forcing science to turn back towards the commonsense view.

Professor Rollin's book contains an introductory chapter, plus chapters on animal consciousness as an object of study; aspects of change in science and philosophy; the tortuous path from Romanes to Watson; animal pain – the 'ideology cashed out'; morality and animal pain; consciousness lost; and consciousness regained, in psychology, in ethology and beyond; together with notes on each chapter, a bibliography and an index. These chapters contain a wealth of historical detail and analysis, and illustrate how attitudes among scientists have been engendered and are changing.

Being both a professor of philosophy and a professor of physiology and biophysics, Bernard Rollin is uniquely qualified to discuss the development of attitudes among scientists and to influence them. However, this book was clearly written with his philosopher's hat on, as it is very long. While it will undoubtedly be of value to philosophers and science historians, most active laboratory research scientists would not have the time or inclination to read such a book. They look to short reviews or letters to *Nature* or *Science* to inform them of new developments in their fields, and are faced with editorial pressures to keep their own published papers short. This lack of opportunities for effective communication and dialogue is a major cause of the underlying problem of poor communication in this field. Perhaps the only solution is the introduction into all higher education in the sciences of ethics courses of the kind pioneered by Professor Rollin at Colorado State University.

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