

## Book reviews

### Morals, Science and Sociality

Edited by H Tristram Engelhardt, Jr and Daniel Callahan, The Hastings Centre, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, 1978. Pp 408 Price \$7.95.

This book is the third volume of a planned four volume series being produced by The Hastings Center, Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences. The point of the ambitious project is to investigate 'the foundations of ethics and its relationship to science' (Preface, p ix). The first volume came out in 1976 and was concerned especially with medical problems, as its title *Science, Ethics and Medicine* indicates. The second volume (1977) was concerned in particular with ethics and religion, and the present one is concerned in particular with the effect of science on ethics and with various other inter-connections and mutual influences of science and ethics. In view of its subject-matter the present volume is of less interest to readers of this *Journal* than the first volume. The authors are highly distinguished in their fields, for example, there are contributions from the philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre, Stephen Toulmin and Gregory Vlastos, and from the molecular biologist Gunther Stent, to name just a few, and they do all make an effort to understand each other's points of view. Moreover, the editors attempt to give the book unity by dividing it into four parts, concerned with the moral roots of science, the foundations of ethics, the scientific roots of morals, and the roots of ethics and science; but the overall impression is one of fragmentation rather than of unity. One also suspects that many of the authors are giving us summarised versions of what they have said or are going to say elsewhere. But to those readers of this *Journal* whose interests are strongly philosophical the book has something to offer, although it is more a book for the

library or piecemeal consultation than for personal purchase or continuous reading.

R S DOWNIE

### Man Against Disease: Preventive Medicine

J A Muir Gray  
pp 192, Price (Paper) £2.50  
Oxford University Press 1979

### Patterns for Uncertainty? Planning for the Greater Medical Profession

Gordon McLachlan,  
Barbara Stocking and  
R F A Shegog (Eds)

Published for Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust by Oxford University Press, 1979, pp 214, Price (Paper) £4.50

Uncertainty prevades both the medical worlds which these books explore. The first one is apparently mainly concerned with preventive medicine, whilst the second addresses the large subject of manpower planning. But Dr Muir Gray, a well known proponent of health promotion, ranges far and wide in an exceptionally honest and thoughtful treatment of the problems besetting his admirable ideals. The second volume has the imprimatur of the Nuffield Hospitals Trust and its editors therefore have excellent credentials. Criticisms and suggestions from such a source must command respect. Yet both books offer no confident predictions or prognoses.

Dr Muir Gray organises his material historically, comparatively (as between developed and developing countries) and on a life cycle framework, to sort the main disorders, diseases and disabilities which we would all dearly like to prevent or modify. He accurately catalogues the present uncoordinated arrangements for reducing health hazards. Although many of today's diseases are theoretically prevent-

able, because their causes most probably lie in the environment, our knowledge of specific causative agents is in practice still strictly limited; confusion reigns, for instance, over cardiovascular diseases, arthritis and most cancers.

We are also very short of accurate epidemiological information on the effectiveness of many currently popular nostrums and regimens. As far as the new field of health education is concerned, we know little about the impact of our feeble and poorly financed efforts to modify health related behaviour, far less about the long consequences upon morbidity and mortality of changing life styles.

'Uncertainty', says Muir Gray, 'is the basis of science, and scientific medicine is full of it'. But he points out that when doctors share their own uncertainties with their patients the latter don't like it. Indeed people can become so anxious about the multiplication of health hazards that their actions may be a directed more to allaying their fears than actively to minimising the risks.

So the problems facing prevention are not confined to knowledge. They are also psychological, ethical and political. How far, for instance, is it permissible for Governments to protect adult citizens from the consequences of their own actions? How justifiable are widespread screening programmes, with the possible provocation of anxiety amongst the many for the sake of uncovering hidden pathology in the few? Also Muir Gray does not let us forget the major influence which poverty and the sub-culture to which someone belongs can have upon their experience of disease and the value they place upon health.

The multi-authored Nuffield Trust volume of commissioned essays contemplates the entire NHS labour force and more besides. The spiralling costs of the service have at least drawn academic attention to what is its main revenue expenditure.