

An Editorial Note

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ABOUT A YEAR AND A HALF AGO, a group of distinguished scholars was convened to discuss "Adequate Minimum Standards for Personal Health Services." Participants in the round table came from a wide range of academic, clinical, administrative, and political fields. A number of the prepared papers were illuminating, and have since been published in this *Quarterly*; others were most informative for the ensuing discussion. Above all, perhaps, the conference proved to be instructive about the obstacles the conveners faced in realizing their hopes of creating a new way to formulate the questions about adequate minimum standards. This was to be prelude to yet a higher-level organizing concept, a more enlightened way to postulate resolutions.

The difficulties and disappointments of the undertaking might have been predicted:

There is a wide gap between multi-disciplinary teams and inter-disciplinary teams. Multi-disciplinary applies when various disciplines provide their views with minimal cooperative interaction. Inter-disciplinarity requires coordination among disciplines and synthesis of material through a higher-level organizing concept. . . . A good test of interdisciplinarity is whether a team can integrate imaginative ideas originating from different disciplinary perspectives so that the work product reflects an expanded lens of perception of reality. (Arnstein and Christakis, 1975: 159-160)

Edwin Newman, whose "civil tongue" is his personal amulet against linguistic miasmas, suspected pomposity here. I think he was wrong; the *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* remains committed to that pursuit of imaginative ideas originating from different disciplinary perspectives. We strive to do so even while "strictly speaking." A major part of this issue of the *Quarterly* attempts to cut across a variety of traditional institutional and behavioral barriers. In exploring "economists and health care," diverse assumptions and divergent value systems have been drawn upon: history, economics, sociology, and political science. Most striking is the lack of any consistent *Weltanschauungen* (please note the Germanic precision, Mr. Newman) *within* the respective disciplines. Perhaps

this should not have been so surprising. Note the following entry under "Sociology" in a turn-of-the-century encyclopedia:

An unexact branch of economics. A hybrid invented by Comte to designate what was and is still known as social science, and was by the Greeks called politics. . . . [I]t would be premature [to regard it as] a science of human society or of man in his social and political relations. A vague and indeterminate study of that which scientists have not yet found to treat scientifically. In all, sociology would be of dwindling importance as a science compared with economics or anthropology. (*Nelson's Encyclopedia*, 1908)

Economists who are central to these discussions are not an unreasonably contentious lot resisting territorial incursions by a historian. Readers of the *Quarterly* may recall the strictures set forth by the usually mild-mannered Francis D. Moore, M.D., against economists who engaged in medical subjects without having suitable prior medical training (*Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 1977). A number of communications from economists to the Editor expressed concern about implied professional insularity and intellectual isolationism. The challenge is now redirected!

Most contemporary scholars identified by Dr. Fox were invited to contribute commentaries on an earlier version of his paper, with special reference to the twin historical sins of omission and revisionism with respect to their own work. Professors Milton Friedman, Martin Feldstein, Victor Fuchs, and Selma Mushkin graciously declined for personal reasons. Their absence is regretted, most poignantly that of Professor Mushkin, doyenne of medical economists. Professor John Dunlop contributed through direct correspondence with Dr. Fox. Although none of the commentators attempted an *apologia pro sua vita*, each has given a disarming glimpse into highly personal and professional views and styles.

The comments are arranged solely to reflect the Editor's judgment of the nature of these differences. The reader may elect other orderings with equal profit and an expanded "perception of reality."

References

- Arnstein, S. R., and Christakis, A. N. 1975. *Perspectives on Technology Assessment*. Jerusalem: Science and Technology Publishers.
- Moore, F. D. 1977. Board Requirements for Economists Who Write on Medical Subjects? A Comment on *The Condition of Surgery*. *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly/Health and Society* 55 (Fall): 455-460.
- Nelson's Encyclopedia*. 1908. London: Thomas Nelson.