

Some Reflections from March 2001



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

This bulletin is based on a discussion by the OPUS Management Group on Saturday, 3 March 2001.

The first major theme was that of emotional deprivation of children. An observation from a therapist: the emotional deprivation of the children of the very rich is as bad as for the children of the multiply disadvantaged poor: maternal abandonment, and hence no development of attachment. Similarly, they go on to residential care, except that it is prep school and Eton rather than a local authority children's home. A possible problem for our institutions is that they are then much more likely than the poor to take up leadership roles, bringing their unresolved disturbances with them.

Meanwhile, a little ethical problem: is it right for the therapist to charge higher fees for comparable work? For professionals working in the field there was a seductiveness in the wealth that might be available to them if they were able to identify rich and famous clients. This notion of moral dilemmas also led onto the other major theme.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the other main theme was that of foot and mouth disease and the way it was impacting on society. This was a bigger ethical problem which generated a range of associations:-

The first being a focus on the notion of interconnectedness. The surprise and lack of understanding of all at the widespread linkages that the disease has thrown up. Not only the linkages in the farming and livestock industry, which were wider and more extensive than had been realised.

For example, discovery of the complexity of a system that makes it profitable to truck sheep from Cumberland to Devon. But also the linkages to other industries in the food chain; and to other countries. In addition The sudden unknown factor so significant that it may hold up a general election.

It showed just how unpredictable life can be.* No one, could for one moment predict that a disease which had been absent in this country since 1967 would now be having the impact that it is. Other diseases such as MRSA were also referred to in like manner. We asked what else don't we know?

The focus then moved to the notion of blame: is it right to slaughter animals suffering from a temporary non-fatal illness? Whose fault? The farmer? The market economy? Supermarkets (targeted by Blair)? We quickly get caught up in the blame culture. Blame that capitalism was responsible for the obscene slaughter of animals when they could be left to live. A slaughter that was only justified on the grounds that to keep animals alive

would result in diminished economic returns for capitalist farmers and others in the chain.

Then there is the denial that we as a society raise these animals simply in order to kill them. It was difficult, even for someone raised in the country and with an understanding of country ways, to make the connection that these animals were all going to be slaughtered anyway, and, that this was the whole purpose of raising them. And the gap or split between country and town. "Country people are used to killing" which of course they do on behalf of us townspeople, who happily eat the meat without a thought for the process that brings it to our table. The split between country members and urban members was such that the latter had a near total incomprehension of the role that farmers played on behalf of society. How do farming families cope? A woman brought up on a dairy farm reported that they used to give names to the calves that would be joining the dairy herd, while those destined for the abattoir remained anonymous.

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