

Micha H. Werner (2003): Review of Lennart Nordenfelt and Per-Erik Liss: Concepts of Health and Health-Promotion. Amsterdam; New York 2003: Rodopi. In: The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy 6, p. 333 f.

vorläufige, nicht zitierfähige Manuskriptversion.

Eine zitierfähige Fassung findet sich in:

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This book contains 13 Articles on different topics in the field of medical philosophy and medical sociology. With one exception, all authors are – or have been – teachers or graduate students at the Department of Health and Society (Tema H) at Linköping University, whose 20th anniversary gave reason for the publication. First editor Lennart Nordenfelt is one of the most famous experts on philosophy of health and on questions of health care, who is known especially for his contributions to the definition of health and disease. Second editor Per-Erik Liss wrote his dissertation on *Health Care Needs*. The definition of health and the significance of this concept for health care are also main issues in *Dimensions of Health and Health Promoting*. The meaning of the concept “health” is addressed in a historical and linguistic perspective as well as in the perspective of philosophy (both analytical and phenomenological), clinical psychology and medical sociology. Nordenfelt, with quite subtle arguments, defends his action-theoretic and ‘normativistic’ definition of health as a state, in which an “individual has the (mental and physical) ability to reach his or her vital goals, given acceptable circumstances” against the evolutionary approach of Jerome C. Wakefield, who tries to combine ‘naturalistic’ and ‘normativistic’ elements. Per Anders Tengland gives a very clear and interesting outline on how to use Nordenfelts definition as a normative basis for the conception of instruments for measuring mental health. His study may be read as an example that illustrates the relevance of definitions for clinical practice. Einar Jacobsson in an article on *Health, Psychopathology and ‘Talking Cures’* also refers to Nordenfelts ‘blistic’ definition of health and argues, among other things, that this definition was related to ethical conceptions of the good life. Bo Petersson investigates Platos use of “health” and related concepts, Per Sundström the present use of “health” as a metaphor or metonymy. (One may find it somewhat amazing that Sundström describes his article as “a first exploration of a new field of linguistic-semantic investigation” which “deserves further attention” while not even mentioning the studies of Susan Sontag.) While the articles mentioned above are written more or less in an analytical manner, a second group of studies argues from a phenomenological point of view. Jennifer Bullington in *Health as Receptivity* tries to define health (mental health in particular) by a concept of allostasis which she tries to clarify with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of “structure” and “structure transformation”. Fredrik Svanaeus refers to Martin Heideggers *Sein und Zeit* and identifies health with a specific kind of “homelike being-in-the-world” and, correspondingly, illness with a specific kind of “unhomelike”. To me the phenomenological definitions of health both seem a bit under-determined, although Svanaeus explicitly tries to rebut this objection.

The second half of the book contains contributions to different aspects of health care. Olle Hellström discusses the relevance of the concept of health in the framework of dialogue-based medicine. Kristin Zeiler analyses the implications of different notions of health for reproductive medicine. Referring to the example of an infertile couple which considers IVF, she comes to the conclusion that setting the promotion of health as a goal of medicine gets problematic when applied to reproduction technologies, because “different notions of health sometimes have contradictory consequences”. Bengt Richt addresses the question which needs should be met by caring the elderly, and compares their situation with the situation of chronically ill patients. Per-Erik Liss undertakes the deserving task of dissecting concepts which play a central role in the discussion about the allocation of resources in health-care (“allocation”, “priority setting”, “rationing”, “needs”, “goals”). He also tries to show how decisions on allocation are based on ethical standards. Ingmar Nordin proposes a definition of “quackery” as “linked [...] to false claims of the functionality of therapies”, and Nina Nikku discusses conceptual as well as practical questions of privacy and intimacy; questions which are important for medical and caring activities. While not being able to give due credit to all authors here, I want to say that the book overall raises some very interesting questions and discusses them on a high level. For people interested in conceptual and ethical questions of health care – and in particular the interpenetration of conceptual and ethical questions – this book is a very valuable read.

Micha H. Werner