

From the Editor

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The current number has five articles and three book reviews. The first article is by M. L. J. Wissenburg. In “Parenting and Intergenerational Justice: Why Collective Obligations Towards Future Generations Take Second Place to Individual Responsibility,” Wissenburg considers various theories of intergenerational justice and their simplifications, and goes on to “unpack two popular simplifications: the inevitability of future generations, and the Hardinesque assumption that future individuals are a burden on society but a benefit to parents.” The first assumption obscures certain very important facts and the second assumption “ignores the fact that the benefits and burdens of future individuals are complex, and different for different ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘victims.’” To correct these problems, Wissenburg introduces the idea that individual responsibility for procreation is a crucially relevant variable that allows for a “more sophisticated understanding of the impact of new individuals, generates grounds to prioritize the individual’s interest in responsibility for (creating and equipping) future individuals over any collective intergenerational obligation.” He illustrates this “by introducing a series of moral duties that take precedence over, and perhaps even void, possible collective redistributive duties.”

The second article, “The ‘Revolving Door’ between Regulatory Agencies and Industry: A Problem that Requires Re-conceptualizing Objectivity,” is by Zahra Meghani and Jennifer Kuzma. By “the revolving door,” the authors are referring to a standard problem created by the “flow” of workers between federal agencies and the industries regulated them. This flow can have some advantages because industry veterans might have specialized knowledge that could be useful to regulatory bodies and vice versa. But the authors identify three ethical and policy challenges with this flow. “First, the presence of former key industry personnel on regulatory boards may result in policy decisions about technologies biased in favor of industry

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interests. Second, the ‘revolving door’ could adversely impact the public’s confidence in regulatory decisions about new technology products, including agrifood biotechnologies. And third, the ‘revolving door’ virtually guarantees industry a voice in the policy making process, even though other stakeholders have no assurance that their concerns will be addressed by regulatory agencies.” These problems indicate a failure of the regulatory review process for new technologies, partly because the process is procedurally biased in favor of industry interests. The solution the authors propose is the rejection of traditional notions of objectivity and its replacement by the conception of objectivity developed by Sandra Harding and the reconfiguration of their regulatory review process on the basis of this reconfiguration. “That will ensure that multiple stakeholders are afforded a place at the decision making table. The fair representation of interests of different constituencies in the review process could do much to inspire warranted public confidence in regulatory protocols and decisions.”

The third article is by Ton Baars. In “Experiential Science; Towards an Integration of Implicit and Reflected Practitioner-Expert Knowledge in the Scientific Development of Organic Farming,” Baars explains and justifies the development of a new approach to integrating experiential knowledge with scientific research. “Known as experiential science, the method integrates social sciences, natural sciences, and human sciences and is part of action research. The features of an experiential scientific approach are derived from a methodological reflection on different research projects within organic agriculture.”

In “Agricultural Development and Associated Environmental and Ethical Issues in South Asia,” the fourth article in this issue, authors Mohammad Aslam Khan and S. Akhtar Ali Shah “explore the environmental and ethical dimensions of agricultural development in South Asia and recommend a holistic approach in formulating plans and programs to combat environmental degradation, hunger, and poverty resulting from unsustainable agricultural practice.” They first review the history of agricultural development initiatives in this region and look at the environmental as well as social and ethical spin-offs of the policies behind these initiatives. These policies have led to land degradation and desertification, water scarcity, pollution from agrochemicals, and loss of agricultural biodiversity as well as growing poverty mainly amongst small farmers, food scarcity, and an overall poor quality of life.

In a previous article, Joanne Sneddon and Bernard Rollin described the conflict between PETA and the Australian sheep industry regarding the practice of mulesing (“Mulesing and Animal Ethics,” 23/4: 371–386). In the fifth article of the current issue, authors Alexandra E. D. Wells, Joanne Sneddon, Julie A. Lee, and Dominique Blache explore the motivations behind Australian wool producers’ intentions regarding mulesing; a surgical procedure that will be voluntarily phased out after 2010, following retailer boycotts led by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. In “Farmer’s Response to Societal Concerns About Farm Animal Welfare: The Case of Mulesing,” using telephone interviews, the authors of the current article explore the motivations behind Australian wool producers’ intentions regarding mulesing. The authors found that most “respondents believed mulesing was more effective and involved less cost, time, and effort than the currently available alternatives to prevent

breech strike. Further, they felt relatively little social pressure, as they believed few consumers were concerned about mulesing. However, they noted that if consumer sentiment changed they would likely change their practices.” The authors conclude that the results of their study may “provide insight into how policy makers may influence farmers to change practices in response to societal pressure for improving farm animal welfare”.

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