
Books Forum

The values of life

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While bioethicists defend values of life such as human dignity and patient autonomy, the US Food and Drug Administration estimates the statistical value of a single life to be \$7.9 million—significantly more than the \$40,000 to \$2 million, which the Russian government budgets for its citizens (Appelbaum, 2011). The literature discussed in this Books Forum starts out where Nikolas Rose's *The Politics of Life Itself* left us off ten years ago. In his concluding reflections on somatic ethics and the spirit of biocapital, Rose (2007, p. 255) wondered about links between the birth of the bioeconomy and novel forms of ethical work that human beings conducted in the name of health, longevity, and their vital existence.

In their edited volume *Value Practices in the Life Sciences and Medicine*, Isabelle Dussauge, Claes-Frederik Helgesson, and Francis Lee gathered contributions to an approach they call *valuography*. The chapters cover everything from the eradication of Down Syndrome through prenatal diagnostics and the criteria that computer algorithms use to distribute donor organs to the pharmaceutical industry's payment of so-called

key opinion leaders for putting their name on ghostwritten publications. The common denominator of these case studies is a shift from defining values and analyzing how they inform life in our biosocieties to investigating how these values have been made in the first place. In his review, the philosopher Martin Weiss objects that the critical intent of valuography to disclose violence and the oppression of the weak raises the question of how valuography values, which could only be answered by a valuography of valuography. He is also concerned that valuography levels the hierarchies between economic capital and other forms of value and thereby conceals the dominance of capitalist values.

At least Kaushik Sunder Rajan's new book *Pharmocracy: Value, Politics, and Knowledge in Global Biomedicine* can be absolved from this allegation. His study of the political economy of global pharmaceuticals reveals how access to drugs is a function not just of one but of a whole gamut of capitalisms. While William Faloon's 2011 and 2017 books of the same title decry the corrupting influence of drug companies on the American healthcare system, Sunder Rajan examines how the rule of Big Pharma manifests in India. He analyzes how speculative, bioethical, constitutional, postcolonial, and philanthropic values have harmonized the country's clinical trial regulations and intellectual property rights with a hegemonic system serving Euro-American pharmaceutical corporations. Anthropologist Kristin Peterson situates Sunder Rajan's case study in the context of several recent monographs on globalized biomedicine and its multiple value regimes.

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Together the reviews in this Books Forum survey recent answers to Rose's question of how biocapital and somatic ethics have shaped each other.

References

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