Book Reviews

Atlas of Skeletal Dysplasias, by Ruth Wynne-Davies, Christine M. Hall and A. Graham Apley. Pp. x + 646, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1985. £95.00.

This is an outstanding book. Its essence is a ten year personal study of patients with skeletal dysplasias seen in clinics set up throughout the UK, backed by the unrivalled experience of the authors in genetically determined orthopaedic disorders. The atlas now produced will provide an invaluable work of reference for the increasing number of people – clinicians, radiologists, geneticists and biochemists – interested in these crippling diseases. Each disorder is separately and briefly described and then fully illustrated by radiographs which show the changes in the different parts of the skeleton throughout life which enable one to identify otherwise unknown dysplasias with considerable certainty. Indeed the main strength of this book lies in its firm clinical basis and its thorough radiographic treatment particularly of the true osteochondrodysplasias.

The book is intended as an atlas and should be regarded as such. The authors, as well as the readers, must therefore be disappointed to find that some of the outstanding radiographs have not been well reproduced, often because the plates are too small. This could doubtless be corrected in the next edition; at the same time it would be a help to have an updated and more detailed account of each disorder before the illustrative radiographs.

Enthusiasts look for a rapid biochemical solution of the skeletal dysplasias. Certainly these disorders will become a target for molecular biology. For this and many other reasons it is important that investigation should have a firm clinical base, which this book now provides.

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Cell Surface Science in Medicine and Pathology, by E.N. Wardle. Pp. vii + 607, illustrated. MTP Press, Lancaster, Boston, The Hague, Dordrecht, 1985. £65.00.

This is a remarkable work of scholarship, for in a single-author volume Dr Wardle attempts to cover the vast subject of biology of cell membranes, its place in normal physiology, and the involvement of its pathology in virtually all disease processes. It is a brave attempt, assisted by a large number of figures drawn by Dr Wardle to illustrate the subject matter. One has to ask, however, if it is possible today for a subject of such complexity and breadth to be covered adequately but authoritatively by any one scientist at a level appropriate for postgraduate as well as undergraduate readers. In those areas in which I have a particular interest, namely pharmacological and therapeutic, material is not always clearly presented, and controversial issues lack critical appraisal. Terms, for example 'hypersensitivity', are sometimes used inappropriately,

and technical terms and abbreviations are often introduced without definition on the first occasion.

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The Foundations of Bioethics, by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. Pp. xvi + 398. Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1986. £24.00.

A common format for textbooks of medical ethics is to outline different approaches to ethical theory and then to deal with a series of issues such as, matters relating to life, death and reproduction, personhood, informed consent, rights to health care and the allocation of resources. Whilst covering all the ground Engelhardt has gone further by producing his own account of a secular pluralist morality which provides a unifying intellectual basis for medical ethics. The title 'The Foundations of Bioethics' is therefore right, and the scale and scholarship of the work is impressive.

It is an important book irrespective of whether one agrees with Engelhardt's fundamental view that 'The principle of autonomy marks the very boundary of all moral communities' and is therefore paramount. One consequence is that property rights take precedence over the claims of the poor and disadvantaged for health care, and this is an area where Engelhardt is inconsistent because he is clearly unhappy with the logic of his own analysis. It shows the advantage of a comprehensive moral stance though, because there is no hiding from such real dilemmas. It is to be hoped that similar scholarship, drawing on different perspectives, will be developed in Britain.

With the recent upsurge of interest in medical ethics in Britain, many are looking for an introductory text. This is not the book for them, but for the increasing number who have a serious academic interest it is essential reading. Medical libraries should certainly acquire a copy.

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Fundamentals of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Vol. 1: Obstetrics, Fourth edition, by Derek Llewellyn-Jones. Pp. 503, illustrated. Faber, London, Boston, 1986. £12.50.

Fundamentals of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Vol. 2: Gynaecology, Fourth edition, by Derek Llewellyn-Jones. Pp. 315, illustrated. Faber, London, Boston, 1986. £9.95.

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