Book Reviews

Annual Review of Public Health. Volume 10, Lester Breslow, Jonathan E. Fielding and Lester B. Lave. Pp vi + 460. Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, California, USA, 1989. \$39.00 (U.S.A. and Canada); \$43.00 (elsewhere).

This form of writing, the annual review, is very much part of the American tradition with two substantial publications in the field of public health appearing each year. The first, the *Epidemiological Reviews* which began in 1979, is published under the editorial management of the *American Journal of Epidemiology* and is sponsored by the Society for Epidemiological Research and the International Epidemiological Association. It is now in its 11th edition and is published by Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health. The second series, the *Annual Review of Public Health*, is published by Annual Review Inc. of Palo Alto, California. It began in 1932 with the publication of the *Annual Review of Biochemistry* and now has 27 different subject titles. The *Annual Review of Public Health* is in its 10th year. Like many of this style of publication, it succeeds as much by the skill of the commissioning committee in choosing the subjects (there are 21 this year), as by the quality of the individual reviews. At the end of each volume is a cumulative chapter index of subjects and it is possible to compare the emphasis of the 10th edition with the previous 9. There is a slightly greater emphasis on health services research, health policy and evaluation (6 chapters) and behavioural science (4) and the usual proportion of chapters on epidemiology and biostatistics (5), environmental and occupational health (4) and disease epidemiology (2).

The chapters of the 10th edition, although topical, form a strange mixture. They are, nevertheless, highly relevant to the public health problems in the United Kingdom. Even chapters dealing with underinsurance and the effect of the Medicare Prospective Payment System are of direct relevance following the British Governments' White Paper. Each chapter brings a critical review by an experienced academic of a body of relevant literature. With nearly 2000 references in all, each report can claim with some justification to represent the 'state of the art'. What is remarkable about the series and that of the *Epidemiological Review* is the demonstration of the breadth and depth of academic public health in the United States.

Since the Acheson Report in 1988, Schools of Public Health are becoming fashionable within the United Kingdom. They bring with them the opportunity to create a critical mass of public health academics and practitioners from many different disciplines. Perhaps it might be possible to envisage a review series from the United Kingdom in another ten years.

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The Status of the Human Embryo, edited by G.R. Dunstan & M.J. Sellars. Pp 119. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988. £15.50.

The rapid increase in knowledge in the fields of reproduction and genetics has led to the widespread introduction of new techniques for the treatment of infertility, and the management of genetic disease. These techniques have enabled infertile couples to reproduce, and have allowed individuals carrying harmful genes to embark on pregnancy without fear of having a disabled child. However, while the possibilities opened up by these new techniques may be seen as great medical advances, for many people concerns remain about the ethical aspects of such measures. How can one reconcile respect for human life with measures that may involve the destruction of human embryos?

Too often the ethical debate on these issues has been partisan and ill informed. This book attempts to redress this. The authors are a group drawn from medicine, research, theology and philosophy, all of whom are distinguished in their own fields. They have been meeting regularly under the auspices of the King's Fund for the past ten years, and have spent part of that time in considering and debating fundamental issues on the status of the embryo, and the understanding that comes from considerations of the Greek, Jewish, Christian and Hippocratic traditions that have been formative of western moral viewpoints.

Arising from those discussions the editors have produced this book. There are chapters on the biology of development from conception to fetus and on the medical indications for embryo research. The chapters on the western moral tradition by Gordon Dunstan, the Jewish tradition by Immanuel Jakobovits and on Roman Catholic viewpoints by Brendan Soane are particularly valuable in providing understanding of differing viewpoints on the question of when a human life begins. The book concludes with an analysis from the viewpoint of contemporary philosophy.

The book provides a very useful, informative and thought-provoking review of many of the fundamental ethical issues, and will be of interest both to health care professionals, philosophers and ethicists. While consensus is unlikely over the ethical issues surrounding the use of reproductive technologies, this book will help to ensure that the debate can be both well informed, and the various opposing views understood.

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Digestive Disease Pathology. Volume 1, edited by Shaw Watanabe, Marianne Wolff & Sheldon C. Sommers. Pp 229, illustrated. Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989. £36.00.

It is always useful to consult the preface when considering buying a book and, certainly, before embarking on a book review. Unfortunately, although one is promised in