This book is a welcome addition to the literature on ethical issues as they affect children, and deserves to be widely used by teachers in child health care.

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Changing human reproduction: social science perspectives

Edited by Meg Stacey, London, Sage, 1992, 186 pages, £9.95

This is a collection of essays by social scientists about some of the social and economic aspects of the current revolution in reproduction. It is edited by Meg Stacey, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick. In her introduction she complains that the enlightenment that might have been offered to those involved in this field by social research and analysis has been neglected to the detriment of all concerned.

Naomi Pfeffer discusses the vexed question of resources and points to the large sums of money involved in providing even modest fertility services. Thus most IVF treatment takes place in the private sector. She discusses the implications of 'these quasi private clinics' for the new political economy of health care and concludes: 'Now more than ever before, money and social status are determining who can get treatment for infertility in Britain'. A similar situation prevailed with regard to abortion in the years before the 1967 Abortion Act was passed, and even now barely half the women who need abortions are able to obtain them within the NHS. Money has often been the key to unlocking medical treatment and this is unlikely to change fast in the present circumstances of the National Health Service. Sarah Franklin discusses the 'changing landscape of conception' from a cultural and anthropological point of view. Frances Price concentrates on multiple births which often result from fertility treatment. Such infants are more likely than others to be born disabled and with low birthweights. Research has already shown that family and friends are only ready and willing to provide help for a short time after birth and that social and community help is meagre. How much sense does it

make to spend large resources on producing vulnerable small babies, when few resources are made available for caring for them? This is a key social and ethical question, as well as an economic one. Erica Haimes raises complex questions about privacy and the right to know about one's genetic inheritance. Marilyn Strathern develops this theme with her observation: 'What might be good for the child is not necessarily good for the parents'. The concluding chapter reaffirms the view that birth is as much a social and culturally conditioned event as a biological one, and in view of this, all these new techniques and their consequences need careful social analysis.

It would be hard to disagree with this argument. Advances in the science and technology of reproduction will not, however, wait upon long-term social research. Since the publication of this book, further startling developments have taken place, most recently the births of babies to two elderly women. Two key issues arise which have ethical implications. Do these developments offer more choice to women? Clearly, they do. Will babies born by these means emerge at least as happy and healthy as children born by conventional means? In the nature of things, this cannot be determined for many years. Meanwhile, science marches on. This is a well-timed, thought-provoking book. Further economic and financial analysis would have been welcome. Do these new methods of reproduction result in the births of a higher proportion of handicapped babies who are expensive to care for, as some have suggested? If so, is it ethical to consider providing such facilities without full screening and abortion facilities being made available as part of the service? A parallel collection of essays focusing on the ethical implications of the new childbirth would be welcome to complement this volume.

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The ethics and politics of human experimentation

Paul M McNeill, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 315 pages, £35.00 hb

For those interested or involved in the evolution of the process of ethical review of research on humans, this book would make a useful starting point. The author's recommendation for improving the balance of opinions available on such committees emerges during the course of it. Initially, evidence is adduced that research ethics committees (or institutional review boards in the United States) were developed following the realisation that unethical experiments on humans were continuing in spite of the historical abhorrence of revelations of German atrocities committed in the name of science during World War II. Other historical and indeed recent examples of unethical unreviewed research are cited. Research ethics committees have the task of applying ethical principles and rules of ethics to research proposals with a view to protecting the interests of the research subjects. The author develops his arguments for the need, where it has not occurred, to establish a set of principles to which such committees would adhere and he asserts the need to establish this within the law of the country to ensure that ethics committees are not able to exert too wide a discretion in their decision-making, although a certain degree of discretion is necessary.

A major thesis of the book revolves around the question of balanced representation on the committees themselves. Until now, many committees have been based at, or in relation to, an institution that has a research function so that members of the committee from the staff of the institution may have difficulty in acting in an unbiased way. They will, of necessity, have commitments to the success of research within the institution and they themselves may derive benefit from research publications. This is increasingly the situation, for example, in the UK, where government research-funding is becoming more focused in its distribution, based on grading of an institution's research contribution. The conflict of interests in making decisions on the ethical issues pertaining to research projects could therefore impair the ability of such committee members to reach an unbiased balanced decision in regard to protecting the interests of the research subjects. It is asserted that because the balance of power and influence on ethics committees is weighted in favour of the institution's protagonists, partly because of their knowledge and expertise and partly from their position or status, those members from lay