emerged from a workshop on Ethical Issues in Human Reproductive Technology – Analysis by Women, held in June 1979 at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts.

With admirable speed (the book was published in the US only one year after the conference) the editors have put together all the papers from the workshop and have added analyses and summaries. The result is a powerful, controversial, thought-provoking and highly stimulating book.

The goals of the workshop were to identify the ethical issues involved in setting priorities in research on human reproduction and in the application of such research, to identify the values underlying such issues, to explore any alternative values offered by women and to recommend new approaches for assessing values and determining policy.

The issues covered in the first volume include the ethics of contraceptive development and deployment, Depo Provera and sterilisation abuse, childbirth technologies (with particular reference to electronic fetal monitoring) and the social control of childbirth (with particular reference to the controversy surrounding home versus hospital confinements). The second volume – *The Custom-Made Child* – which has not yet been published in Britain, includes consideration of prenatal diagnosis, sex pre-selection, neonatal care and test tube fertilisation. Although published separately, and reviewed separately below the volumes are to some extent interdependent, the first containing a detailed synthesis of many of the ideas that emerged from the workshop while the second ends with some general resolutions and specific policy proposals that emerged from the workshop.

The editors have not attempted to produce a consistent argument but have reflected the intention of the workshop to 'highlight the diversity of views that emerges from the varied experiences and situations of women'.

The contributors were mostly women involved in health care as doctors, nurses, midwives, scientists, historians, sociologists, ethicists, educators and consumers and they offer a fairly radical view. But a few

liberals and a sprinkling of conservatives enliven the proceedings by challenging some of the more romantic and idealistic assumptions of some of the speakers with the result that the reader is swayed back and forth by the argument and counter-argument.

The level of argument varies from the highly personal to the most academic, the latter including the most detailed documentation the reviewer has seen on the risks of Depo Provera. Even when dealing with well-worked issues, there are often original insights offered. For example, when discussing informed consent, it is suggested that this should include feedback from the patient to show that the explanation offered has been understood – not a normal practice on either side of the Atlantic. But there are also new issues considered such as 'women-controlled research' – research which recognises individual differences rather than trying to eliminate them and where the woman is both subject and experimenter.

For the British reader, the American origin of the book may have its drawbacks as some of the issues may not seem relevant here. But in many cases the differences are only of degree and the starker form in which some issues appear in America often allows a clearer analysis which has definite relevance to Britain too.

Although this book should be read by all those involved in family planning, obstetrics and gynaecology, in practice the readership will probably be confined to the more liberal fringe. The presentation of the book and the emphasis on women's views will cause it to be dismissed by many, while the controversial and hard-hitting arguments will antagonise others. This is a pity – but it is not the fault of the book.

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The Custom-Made Child?: Women-Centred Perspectives

Helen B Holmes, Betty B Hoskins, Michael Gross, (ed), Humana Press Inc, Clifton New Jersey, 1981, 368 pp, US \$14.95.

Huxley's *Brave New World* of scientifically graded human beings is happily still far off. But as we know

genetic engineering is rapidly moving out of the realms of futuristic fiction to become a fact of advanced medical practice. The range of techniques for scientifically controlling, manipulating and intervening in human fertility and reproduction is growing steadily. Ectogenesis may still be largely experimental, but pre-natal diagnosis already permits of the detection of fetal abnormality and sex, and thus the possibility of rejecting the fetus who does not meet our expectations of human normality, or desired sex. Hence we can already make our children according to our particular culture's customs and value systems of human perfection and gender preference, even if this does not yet occur as widely in British as in American practice.

Two thirds of this report of an American women's conference on Ethical Issues in Human Reproductive Technology are devoted to wide ranging consideration of the political and moral assumptions in ectogenesis, pre-natal diagnosis, and sex pre-selection, and the potential social and eugenic implications of such techniques. Since the conference attempts to confront topical issues across the reproductive field which especially affect women and their children, it also has sections on attitudes and policies in neonatology, and mortality and morbidity in diethylstilboestrol use. This is not a discussion of reproductive ethics as they affect doctors but as they affect women who bear and nurture the next generation. For as this volume points out, women are the main recipients of policy and practice in reproductive medicine, and therefore have a legitimate voice which must be heard. Hitherto women have had little or no say in an area of medicine which has such a profound impact, not simply on female biology but also on the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of women and their families.

Biologists, geneticists, bio-ethicists and health professionals provide informed and wide ranging contributions to the book. Most of them are women, many are mothers themselves. The contributors are thus well placed to appreciate real benefits which accrue from humane applications of science, and equally are equipped to be properly critical of the potential which science contains for depersonalising, exploiting

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News and notes

Leverhulme Trust award

The Trustees of the Leverhulme Trust have made an award to the Society for the Study of Medical Ethics of £38 950 over two years for a study of the ethics of clinical research investigations on children.

The right to live and the right to die

A residential weekend conference for medical, nursing and other students has been arranged by Cumberland Lodge from Friday 23 April to Sunday 25 April 1982.

There will be a moral philosopher in residence, and speakers will represent medicine and other disciplines.

Further details and application forms from Miss Ruth Norton, Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, Windsor, Berks.

Mental Health (Amendment) Bill

In the Government's new Bill, the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill, published in November 1981 major reforms in the law governing the detention in hospital of mentally disordered patients were proposed.

This Bill considerably strengthens the safeguards for patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1959, clarifies the

position of staff looking after them and removes some uncertainties in the law.

The White Paper entitled *Reform of Mental Health Legislation* (1) which accompanies the Bill sets out and explains the background to the main proposals, which are:

- 1) The period before detention has either to be renewed or ended is halved.
- 2) For certain groups, detention in hospital is allowed *only* if the person is thought treatable.
- 3) Access to Mental Health Review Tribunals is increased.
- 4) The position on consent is clarified.
- 5) The standards of care given to detained patients and the use of powers of detention are safeguarded through the new Mental Health Act Commission.
- 6) Guardianship powers are made to fit current good practice.
- 7) Increased opportunity for psychiatric assessment and treatment to be provided for those appearing before the courts by introducing, as resources allow, interim hospital orders and remands to hospital.

The new Bill follows five years of detailed consultation with the professions, other bodies and individuals concerned in the care of the mentally disordered.

Reference

- (1) *Reform of Mental Health Legislation*. Cmnd 8405. London: HMSO, 1981.

International congress: 14th Trans-disciplinary symposium on Philosophy and Medicine

The congress entitled 'The use of human beings in research: philosophical, medical, legal and religious considerations' will be held 5-9 September 1982 at the School of Medicine University of Tel-Aviv, Israel.

The speakers will include William Bynum, PhD, H Tristram Engelhardt, Jr, PhD, MD, Stuart Spicker, PhD, Robert Massey, MD, Arthur Caplan, PhD, Stephen Toulmin, PhD, Andre de Vries, MD, Phyllis Dalgli, PhD, Hans-Martin Sass, PhD, Corinna Delkeskamp-Hayes, PhD, Ann Fagot, PhD, MD, Amos Shapira, JD and Ilai Alon, PhD. The congress is designed critically to review the concepts and problems germane to the use of human beings in biomedical and behavioural research. The conference is co-sponsored by the Meychan Chair for the History and Philosophy of Medicine, the Ben Gurion Fund, Tel-Aviv University Faculty of Law, Israel and the Division of Humanistic Studies in Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Connecticut, Farmington, Connecticut, USA.

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and dominating womens' experience of maternity. This book makes an impassioned plea that doctors consider womens' needs and understand women as whole people, and not simply sets of reproductive organs presenting medical problems.

The book therefore makes a contribution to ideas about a holistic obstetric and gynaecological medi-

cine, and moves ethical debate about reproduction away from the more familiar theological battlefield onto a terrain of secular humanism. This terrain is mapped out by women themselves and is informed by feminism. As a humanistic ethic, feminism is still in its infancy. Hence much of the book's philosophical debate is somewhat schematic, and

lacking the depth and precision which classical traditions have built up over centuries. Nevertheless the book breaks new ground and raises an agenda of new questions which doctors can ill afford to ignore.

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