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[Book Review of] *Ethical Issues in Human Genetics*, by Bruce Hilton et al., editors

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and the ethical treatments do not reach the cogency or clarity of, for example, Paul Ramsey's article on the morality of embryo transfer experimentation, in *JAMA* 220:1346-1350, 1480-1485

1972), published six months before the symposium was held.

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Book Review

Ethical Issues in Human Genetics

by Bruce Hilton et al., editors

Plenum Press, 1973, 455 pp.

Ethical Issues in Human Genetics contains the proceedings of a 1971 conference sponsored by the Hastings Center. Some 80 geneticists, doctors, lawyers, philosophers, theologians and sociologists participated, most of them Americans. Twenty-six major papers were delivered, but 100 pages of the book are also devoted to discussion transcripts. A helpful glossary and index are provided.

More than 200 genetic counseling services now operate in this country. Diagnostic and therapeutic techniques are being developed rapidly, while public awareness of available genetic knowledge also grows. The call for genetic counseling services will certainly continue its rapid increase. But of all the applied sciences, this one stands out for its thorny ethical problems. It is encouraging that geneticists are discussing these problems openly, and seeking input from other concerned disciplines.

The unifying impression one receives from this book is the genuine personal concern of the participants for the *people* involved. People clearly are more important than theories, abstract concepts, or unattainable eugenic goals (J. F. Crow). Education is preferable to legislation (M. M. Kaback). Privacy is a prime value (J. Hill), as is *helping* families reach informed decisions rather than making the decisions for them (J. R. Sorenson).

The human values of personal integrity, inviolability and dignity have grown slowly as our species has come of age. It would be tragic folly to abrogate these now in favor of restrictive approaches to the problems of human genetics . . . to construct a human anthill (D. Callahan). Both scientific (J. F. Crow) and sociological (J. V. Neel) reasons can be put forward to discourage precipitous commitment to specific eugenic policies.

It is clear that we at least need a prior clarification of the concepts of health, disease, and human nature (C. Fried). (The Hastings Center has since published a valuable paperback — *The Concept of Health*.)

The conferees gave attention to qualifications for genetic counselors (F. C. Fraser), techniques and trends in the field (J. R. Sorenson; J. W. Littlefield), and the model Tay-Sachs screening program in the Washington-Baltimore area (M.M. Kaback). John Fletcher's analysis of moral problems arising in genetic counseling situations is outstanding; this, with the papers of Paul Ramsey, Daniel Callahan and Leon Kass, would make the book valuable even without the many other fine presentations.

Fletcher asserts that abortion, although it may be acceptable under some circumstances, can never be considered therapeutic for the diseased fetus. It is, after all, a technique for avoiding the pain of bearing and caring for the 'defective' child — but it is a *cure* for nothing. In any case, prospective parents should not be pressed for absolute consent to abortion before undergoing amniocentesis (C. Valenti). Kass suggests, moreover, that abortion on genetic grounds may find itself resting on arguments which also support infanticide, homicide and slavery. (It should be noted that the conference was held several months prior to the controversial 1972 Supreme Court rulings on abortion laws.)

This book is a milestone in the discussion of bioethics. It is a valuable contribution to the consideration of genetic counseling and the interface of intimate family planning decisions with broad social concerns.

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