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Book Review

Bradley J. Olson

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Book Reviews

BIOTECHNOLOGY: ASSESSING SOCIAL IMPACTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS. (David J. Webber, ed., Greenwood Press 1990) [239 pp.] Bibliography, contributor data, index, notes, preface, tables. LC: 90-2935; ISBN: 0-313-27454-1. [Cloth. \$42.95. P.O.B. 5007, Westport, CT 06881]

Professor Webber's stated intention is to provide a social science assessment of issues of interest and concern to governmental and private institutional policy makers who will control the emerging biotechnology industry. He divides the presentation into four parts, containing thirteen essays, representing the contributions of several social sciences and providing a range of opinions and projections concerning potential social impacts and ways to deal with them.

The first part of the book addresses the social, political and even theological dimensions of biotechnology, but mostly within the U.S. For example, the essay treating theological perspectives is limited to consideration of Judeo-Christian perspectives.

The second part of the book discusses responses of three types of institutions to biotechnical development: American universities, domestic agricultural cooperatives and international agriculture research centers. Until recently, most agricultural innovation could not be protected by patents and other forms of intellectual property, but papers in this part reveal that changes in the law have had a major impact by shifting R&D funding from the public to the private sector. For example, some university administrators have become interested in "technology transfer," and one essay presents an empirical study of factors influencing university biotechnical patent activity. Among its findings is that: A professional staff is useful if more patent activity is desired, but patent activity is inhibited if academic career advancement primarily depends on publication of peer-reviewed *primary* research.¹

¹ Attempts to shift academic incentives toward applied research, however, have

In the third part of the book, the effects of proprietary rights in biotechnology are also discussed, but the main concern is the effects of, e.g., the need for regulatory compliance. While the first essay is quite broad, the second and third focus on federal regulation and examine, respectively, the likely impact of regulation on the use of genetically engineered organisms in dairy fermentation and on the use of growth hormones in milk and meat production.

BIOTECHNOLOGY ends with discussions of the evolution of policy debates from *whether* to *how* biotechnology will be used and the responses of federal and state officials. The concluding chapter, written by the editor, challenges policy analysts to be more responsive to the needs of Congress and challenges Congress to be more *alert to* as well as to *use* “policy knowledge.”

Unfortunately, the potential utility of this book is diminished in two ways. First, while Webber acknowledges that legal and life sciences perspectives also must be considered in addressing future uses of biotechnology, his book offers scant treatment of more direct impacts on humans — ones that may prove to transcend those raised by agricultural applications.² Further, while projected behavior of the private sector plays a major role in the book, papers were written from what appear to be primarily governmental and academic perspectives. It would have been useful to have had contributions from people more directly representing views of the private sector.

Bradley J. Olson[†]

major implications. In a closely related vein, see Harnett, *Federal Technology Transfer: Should We Build Subarus in Bethesda?* 1 RISK 313 (1990).

² See, e.g., the review of Freedman’s book *infra* at 177.

[†] Mr. Olson received his B.A. (Biology) from Central Connecticut State University and his M.S. from the University of Connecticut. He has several years of laboratory experience in biochemistry and has completed his first year at Franklin Pierce Law Center.