

January 1995

Review of: Lawrence J. Kaplan & Rosemarie Tong, Controlling Our Reproductive Destiny: A Technological and Philosophical Perspective

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Sophie M. Sparrow, *Review of: Lawrence J. Kaplan & Rosemarie Tong, Controlling Our Reproductive Destiny: A Technological and Philosophical Perspective*, 6 RISK 89 (1995).

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Lawrence J. Kaplan & Rosemarie Tong, *Controlling Our Reproductive Destiny: A Technological and Philosophical Perspective* (The MIT Press 1994). Appendix (basic biochemistry), illustrations, index, notes, preface, series foreword by Samuel Goldberg, tables. CIP 93-38060, ISBN 0-262-11176-4 [418 pp. Cloth \$29.95. 55 Hayward St., Cambridge MA 02142.]

Kaplan and Tong, a biochemist and a philosopher, provide an excellent interdisciplinary text about current and future reproductive technologies for use in undergraduate courses. Because of their clear, well organized and thoughtful presentation of the impact of these technologies on individuals, this text would be an asset in such a setting. By discussing ethical, legal and social implications of contraception, sterilization, abortion, artificial insemination, contracted motherhood, in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer in addition to clearly explaining the methods of reproductive technologies, their text allows readers to understand technical fundamentals and ask important, well-informed questions.

The authors tackle critical social concerns head on, noting that access to the best means of contraceptive and fertility enhancing technologies is limited by power and wealth; women continue to bear the burden of responsibility for contraception; and emerging embryo-saving technologies raise questions about ownership, rights and responsibilities. Moreover, ethical and social questions posed about current reproductive technologies will apply to future ones. Discussing these questions should, as the authors intend, encourage students to responsibly consider their reproductive choices.

In discussing the ethical and social implications of reproductive technologies, Kaplan and Tong succeed in providing balance throughout their book. They initially describe predominant western ethical traditions, and then refer throughout to the work of ethicists in these and other traditions. Done in a dispassionate, nonjudgmental way, this provides a refreshing perspective on issues such as abortion that are so often addressed only in polarized fashion. By including perspectives that range from Roman Catholic theorists to Marxist feminists, they encourage discussion and debate. Unfortunately,

however, in discussing issues such as contracted motherhood, in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer, some perspectives on these technologies are labeled as “liberal feminist” and “radical feminist.” Such labeling marginalizes these views and, given the current political climate, may allow them to be too easily dismissed. Fortunately, this minimally detracts from a work that has much to offer.

Structurally, the book is well laid out. Each section, treating an area such as contraception, explains the technology, often using illustrations and diagrams, then addresses the ethical, legal and, finally, social dimensions. The authors address what is currently available, such as RU 486, Depo-Provera and Norplant and what may soon be developed, e.g., a wider range of male contraceptives. Addressing the social dimensions of contraception, they note common observations, such as that women are generally responsible for contraception and mention new developments; e.g., AIDS awareness has made more men willing to wear condoms.

The authors frequently relate developments to the bigger picture of reproductive choices. They point out that, instead of fighting over the legal rights of those engaged in contracted motherhood, society should try to provide all children with a nurturing environment. Similarly, they bridge the gap between pro-choice and pro-life advocates, suggesting that both would agree that a world where women did not have to face abortion as a choice would be preferable.

By putting discussions about reproduction in a greater context, this book provokes important debate. As Kaplan and Tong so aptly note in their introduction, technology is often developed and used before its ethical and social implications are fully understood. Students exposed to this text should be well equipped to discuss these technologies and use the questions it poses in analyzing reproductive developments well into the future.

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