J. biosoc. Sci. (2003) **35**, 317–320

Book reviews

Infertility in the Modern World. By Gillian R. Bentley & C. G. Nicholas Mascie-Taylor. Pp. 264. (Cambridge University Press, 2000.) £15.95, ISBN 0-521-64387-2, paperback.
DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003003171

Infertility can be a touchy subject, often invoking strong reactions: fear, shame, anger and mistrust. Part of the reason for this might be that, over recent years, the ground seems to be shifting under our feet very rapidly. New reproductive technologies, environmental changes and shifting social processes have had a great impact on how we see and understand infertility and childlessness. This wide-ranging, inter-disciplinary set of perspectives on infertility in the modern world is very timely.

The book deals with the question of infertility from a number of disciplinary viewpoints: biomedical, environmental and social. These classifications necessarily become blurred and overlap to some extent. This cross-fertilization is a major strength of the book. Chapters 2 and 3, for example, which deal with biomedical approaches to infertility (new reproductive technologies and genetic influences on fertility respectively), raise some important social questions. What might be the social consequences, for example, of substantially raising the age of parenthood or of producing offspring, through infertility treatment, who will themselves be infertile?

Chapters 4 and 5, which look at environmental influences on fertility, raise some very important concerns about infertility in both industrialized and developing countries. Popular concerns about the effects of environmental pollutants on fertility are addressed in Chapter 4, which draws cautiously optimistic conclusions. Chapter 5 discusses the impact of HIV/AIDS, synergistically with other sexually transmitted diseases, on fertility in sub-Saharan Africa. The infertility consequences of AIDS are much less widely documented than the more obvious impacts on mortality, but, particularly where people's livelihoods and the social status of women depend on childbearing, they can be as devastating in the longer term.

I was particularly fascinated by Chapter 6, which looks at voluntary childlessness in the UK. Much has been written recently on the western European fertility decline. Most work to date has relied on quantitative surveys, which look at events rather than processes, and make it difficult to predict whether childlessness will be a temporary or a continuing trend. The study described here looks qualitatively at the process of 'becoming childless', which occurs as a series of re-negotiated decisions, not as a single decision taken at one point in time. Chapter 7, on sexuality and fertility, also challenges some of the basic assumptions often made, and shows the danger of over-simplifying categories and reproductive processes.

Overall, this is an excellent overview of contemporary infertility issues, well written and engaging. The introductory chapter could, perhaps, have been used to provide more of an integrative framework for the rest of the volume, and to move towards a synthesis of ideas and issues. With so many very different perspectives presented in

the book, this might help in drawing things together. However, by the end of the volume, the reader is in an excellent position to do this her/himself, and will, I'm sure, be inspired to find out more.

Kate Hampshire
University of Durham

Myth and Reality in the Rain Forest. How Conservation Strategies are Failing in West Africa. By John F. Oates. Pp. 338. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999.) US$ 19.95, ISBN 0-520-22252-0, paperback.
DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003220125

Over the past two decades, biological conservation has increasingly embraced development, and particularly community-based development, as a conservation tool. Proponents of economic rationales for, and incentives from, protected areas have grown in number, and consequently conservation projects are increasingly required to demonstrate tangible rewards for local populations, often through associated development projects. In this book, John Oates promotes a more traditional perspective, namely that nature should be protected for its own intrinsic value, and argues that the marriage of conservation with development has had disastrous consequences for the former.

Focusing on the West African rainforests where he has spent much of the past three decades studying primates, Oates presents a series of case studies in an effort to demonstrate that modern conservation theory has got it wrong, and that focusing on people detracts from the real reason for the existence of parks, namely to protect wildlife and wildlands.

This is a very personal, semi-autobiographical account, and its strength lies in its absorbing historic detail of the people and places at the heart of West African conservation. Moreover, it makes some very valid observations regarding the direction in which conservation has evolved. By turning to the large aid agencies for funding, the conservation community has been driven to applying for and accepting increasingly inflated budgets that support the employment of expensive overseas consultants and planners whilst often neglecting the basic and cost-effective elements of any sound conservation programme, namely security and staff morale. Small-scale and low-budget initiatives may work better but seem to contradict the current 'commercialization' of conservation. Equally, placing the emphasis on human development can lead to inflated and unrealistic expectations among local communities regarding the benefits they might receive, which in turn leads to antagonism when these expectations remain unfulfilled.

However, whilst the problems facing rainforest conservation were clearly illustrated in the book, many appeared to be more a result of prevailing national political and economic climates rather than of a sea-change in conservation philosophy. Oates goes as far as to admit that in some cases it may be relevant to provide some local incentives for conservation, such as through the promotion of tourism, and he seems more at odds with the way this philosophy may have been interpreted than with the idea itself. Moreover, the example of India as an alternative strategy where intrinsic value is promoted may not be directly comparable with the situation in West Africa.

After a couple of chapters detailing his early expeditions, Oates presents a very interesting historical account of the changes in conservation philosophy from protectionism to integrated conservation and development. This is followed by four detailed case studies covering examples in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana. Chapter 8 is a rather incongruous exposé of the illusion that zoos contribute to conservation through captive breeding and re-introductions. This is neither novel nor particularly relevant to the rest of the book, except as an additional example of a conservation policy with which Oates appears to disagree. The final chapter wraps things up by widening the debate to briefly examine some well-known community conservation initiatives elsewhere in Africa, and contains the most convincing evidence in the book that integrated conservation and development may have its flaws. This is followed by the earlier mentioned example of India where protectionist policies appear to prevail. Whether the example is truly applicable to Africa, with its vastly different political situation, is debatable.

Overall this is a very absorbing read which should give all those interested and involved in conservation pause for thought, but those expecting a dispassionate and objective analysis of the issues surrounding integrated conservation and development may be left wanting more.

Matt Walpole
Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology,
University of Kent at Canterbury

Great Issues for Medicine in the Twenty-First Century. Ethical and Social Issues Arising out of Advances in the Biomedical Sciences. Edited by D. C. Grossman & H. Valtin. Pp 277. (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 882, 1999.) US$ 60.00, ISBN 1-57331-143-X.
DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003230121

This volume presents the proceedings of the Dartmouth Medical School's Bicentennial Symposium held in 1997. Though a few years have already passed since the date of the Symposium, its contents are still current for our understanding of the future. The school is the fourth oldest medical school in the United States (preceded by Pennsylvania, Columbia and Harvard). The Bicentennial celebration brought together a number of distinguished physicians, scientists and politicians. Among them were C. Everett Koop, a former Surgeon General of the US, Lonnnie R. Bristow, a president of the American Medical Association (1995–1996), Francis S. Collins, the Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, Al Gore, then the Vice-President of the US, and a number of Nobel Prize winners. This ensured a broad and representative coverage of the topic.

It is difficult to describe in this short review contents of all 30 presentations and published records of discussions, thus mention of the session titles must suffice. These were: 'The Human Genome', 'Intelligence – The Origin and Substrate of Thinking', 'Health Care: For Whom and By Whom ?', 'World Population: The Crisis of Human Crowding' and 'The Future'. The Vice-Presidential address – 'Population Growth and Environmental Impact' – very aptly reminded the participants that the human population, with its technological potential, has already reached the stage at which it influences the entire Earth, and thus that any decisions about the future must take

into account the global situation. Everett C. Koop discussed the development of market-driven health care systems, thus bringing into focus the other powerful delimiter of medical practice – economy. Both physical constraints of the Planet Earth and rules of economy put limits on future developments in medicine and health care. Traditionally, the major restraint on medical practice was limited medical knowledge. Although far from knowing everything, the progress in genetics, in neurosciences, in social sciences and many other areas of knowledge in the last century has been such that major issues now relate to how this knowledge can be best used and expanded rather than how to obtain answers to fundamental questions. This new situation brings to the fore ethical issues in research and in patient care, as choices have to be made taking into account factors other than the best physical cure or benefits to an individual patient. Once again medicine, though firmly based in science, must turn to a larger extent to social sciences and the liberal arts to be able to serve the complex world of the next century.

In closing Heinz Valtin, an organizer of the symposium, expressed his optimism saying that ' . . . as new facts and capabilities raise novel ethical and social issues, means will be found to deal with these problems' (p. 258).

M. Henneberg
Department of Anatomical Sciences,
University of Adelaide

Beginning Statistics: An Introduction for Social Scientists. By Ian Diamond & Julie Jefferies. Pp. 254. (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, 2001.) £50.00, ISBN 0-7619-6061-9, hardback; £16.99, ISBN 0-7619-6062-7, paperback.
DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003240128

Data presentation is an essential part of descriptive statistics, and plays a crucial role in the proper understanding of the concept. This book by Diamond and Jefferies is devoted to the practicalities of presenting and arranging data and its interpretation, rather than multivariable statistical methods or heavy statistics.

The book consists of fourteen chapters plus four appendices. After a very short introduction to the importance of statistics in real life, the next two chapters review basic methods of presenting data using tables and graphs. The subsequent two chapters introduce the basic parameters of central tendency, distribution and variation. Afterwards the authors introduce the basic concepts of normal distribution and its application to real data. The last three chapters describe the primary method of comparisons of means for continuous variables between different samples. The book ends with two chapters depicting measure of association between two variables and elementary methods for analysing categorical data.

In sum, the clarity, simplicity and use of many practical examples makes this book very useful, primarily for under- and postgraduate students, as a supplementation to statistical courses.

Slawomir Koziel
Institute of Anthropology,
Polish Academy of Sciences
Wroclaw, Poland