

Book reviews

Genetics and the Law. Edited by A. MIL-UNSKY and G. J. ANNAS. (Pp. 532. U.S. \$27.00.) New York: Plenum Press. 1976.

This book contains the Proceedings of a National Symposium held in Boston, Mass. in 1975, the participants being medical and nonmedical geneticists and lawyers, with a sprinkling of ethicists, sociologists, and psychiatrists. With members from such varying backgrounds, the discussions reported verbatim were lively and occasionally heated. These discussion sessions provide some of the best material in the book since they illustrate the immense difficulty in finding answers to the ethical dilemmas raised by rapidly advancing techniques, let alone in up-dating legislation as these advances impinge more and more on the public.

Since the law under discussion is all American law and legislation from state to state differs, the legal details are irrelevant and sometimes irritating to a non-American reader.

The importance of the book is that it reveals the urgent necessity of dialogue between geneticists, lawyers, and responsible laymen. Legislation tends to reflect public opinion and the book illustrates a point made by one participant that the provision of careful but detailed information for the public through the media is helpful, whereas sensational publicity has a harmful and negative effect.

The main topic sections are: (1) The Fetus and the Newborn; (2) Genetic Counselling: Mass Population Screening; (3) Genetics and Family Law. (This covers the problem of AID and sterilization of minors and the mentally retarded). (4) Research and Experimentation—*in vitro* fertilization and clonal man. (5) Eugenics, Ethics, Law, and Society. This final section includes two papers on the policy of non-treatment of defective newborns which would be of interest to general paediatricians despite the fact that American medicine is more law-minded than that elsewhere.

All in all this is a book that asks many questions, answers few, but provides an excellent basis for discussion.

CAROLINE BERRY

Malnutrition and Brain Development. By M. WINICK. (Pp. 169; illustrated + tables. £5.00.) London: Oxford University Press. 1976.

This single-author monograph is beautifully produced and most lucidly written. It is presented in five sections: Clinical Malnutrition, Normal Cellular Growth of the Brain, Nutrition and Cellular Growth of the Brain, Malnutrition and Prenatal Growth, and Malnutrition and Mental Development. Under these headings Winick describes his own substantial contributions to the field, and his book will survive as an historical account of just that. Unfortunately for the general reader hoping to find a balanced account of this most important subject, it may be misleading. Winick's findings and attitudes are not universally unchallenged and there is a great deal of important and more recent literature which is not discussed. His recent modifications of his own earlier pronouncements (for example, concerning the later postnatal cessation of the cell-multiplicative phase of human brain growth) are disarmingly illustrated by the old data which earlier led him to contrary conclusions without any acknowledgement of the disparity, and this is confusing. And Winick still believes that the events of brain growth in the fetal rat can be compared with those occurring in the fetal human, leading him to draw important but probably erroneous human conclusions from this mistaken viewpoint. The book should be on the shelves of every serious student of the subject, but the contemporary and more compendious volume by Dodge, Prenskey, and Feigin (*Nutrition and the Developing Nervous System*, published by Mosby) should have higher priority even though it is very much more expensive.

J. DOBBING

Baillière's Medical Transparencies. No. 17 Paediatrics. Edited by H. JOLLY and R. G. WILSON. (Pp. 8; 24 slides £8.50+60p VAT.) London: Baillière Tindall. 1976.

This is a collection of 24 slides of paediatric conditions contained in a small, neat booklet with a brief introduction and an explanatory legend for each slide, the slides themselves being in a transparent wallet which can be pulled out to make them readily visible. Drs. Jolly and Wilson have tried hard and with some success to make the slides reasonably representative of paediatrics, including mostly common but a few rare conditions. There is of course a problem in that some common and important conditions are not easily demonstrated by pictures. Thus modern neonatal intensive care is illustrated by a vast array of equipment with a tiny baby somewhere inside it, while the importance of accidents as the commonest cause of childhood death after 1 year is illustrated by a child in gallows traction. The legends are mostly concise and accurate though the statement that 'cerebral palsy is almost always the result of cerebral anoxia at birth' is highly questionable.

The introduction states that the slides are intended to supplement demonstrations and lectures. My students and I had an enjoyable hour looking at the slides 'blind' and working out what they showed. Many systematic paediatric teachers could probably produce a larger and possibly a better set of teaching slides from their own collections. However, most of us are not as systematic about photographing visible abnormalities and labelling and storing the slides as we would like to be, and this neat collection is excellent value for money.

ROGER ROBINSON