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**Book Reviews**


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**Australian Academy of Science (ed.): Recombinant DNA: An Australian-Perspective.** Canberra: Australian Academy of Science 1980. 129 pp.

Becoming concerned with the sometimes frantic and always complex development of recombinant DNA research and its implications for society, the Australian Academy appointed a committee in 1975 to advise it on the hazards associated with *in vitro* production of recombinant DNA molecules unlikely to occur in nature. This committee, called ASCORD (Academy of Science Committee on Recombinant DNA Molecules), with Professor G.L. Ada as current chairman, set up an ad hoc committee (chairman F.J. Fenner) which was responsible for the report in question.

The report begins with an overview of the different aspects of genetic engineering and genetic manipulation as they affect Australian scientists and the Australian public. This is followed by such topics as: the technical aspects of recombinant DNA research, practical application, hazards, the role of the legal system, and surveillance. All are described in a precise, clear-cut language.

The report concludes with practical recommendations concerning the establishment of a system of extra-legal guidelines and delegated authority for legal control. As there is no machinery for monitoring the use of recombinant DNA technology in industry and agriculture in Australia, the federal government has been advised to set up an agency to administer all uses of recombinant DNA molecules in this continent of the southern hemisphere.

The Australian report keeps a cool and impartial intellectual distance from the problem. It states clearly that the early concern about conjectured hazards to human health associated with recombinant DNA research have been proved to have been misplaced. The commonly used procedure for molecular cloning with *E. coli* as host and non-conjugative plasmids as vectors can be safely carried out with standard microbiological facilities. There is no more danger, perhaps even less, than that arising from ordinary accepted laboratory procedures handling pathogenic microorganisms, an everyday procedure in hospital microbiology laboratories. The danger of escaping modified microorganisms into the environment and producing adverse ecological effects is considered conjectural and the risk is considered less than that caused by the importation of exotic microorganisms, plants and animals.

One can only hope that the "Australian Perspective" will soon become a world perspective for recombinant DNA.

H. F. Linskens, Nijmegen

**Sullerot E. (ed.): Die Wirklichkeit der Frau.** München: Steinhilber 1980. 640 pp. Hard bound DM 38,-.

One of the leading figures of the French woman emancipation movement functions as editor of this remarkable book, which is preceded by a preface by André Lwoff, reason enough to take a serious look at it. Thirty-five internationally recognized biologists, anthropologists, physicians and sociologists met at the Human Science Research Centre at Royaumont, and there, theoretically untouched by ideologies and cultural pressures, discussed the topic: "What is the actual position of women according to the newest scientific information?". Under the original title "Le Fait Féminin", the book was published in the Librairie Arthème in Paris, and was dedicated to the memory of Jacques Monod (1910–1979). It contains the following sections: the body, the individual, the society, and concludes with a glossary of biological and genetical technical terms. For the first time, facts concerning the female sex have been collected, enabling a matter-of-fact discussion of the specific situation of female human beings. Starting with sex determination, ontogenetic and phylogenetic problems, the structural, physiological, and pathological differences between males and females are explained. Much space is devoted to such psychological aspects as transsexualism, the sex specific neurology, the role of hormones, and sex dependant distribution of psychiatric abnormalities. Historical aspects come into the foreground with topics such as sexual selection, evolution of behaviour, adaptation of biological terms to men and vice-versa, the position of females in the 12th and 19th century, the role of the woman in the history of the Western family, and in Europe at the end of the seventies. Each chapter is self-contained and offers much material for extensive discussion.

The editor, Evelyne Sullerot, special adviser to the European Economic Community and the International Labor office, has directed numerous projects for UNESCO and other international institutions. Her name guaranteed high scientific standards and fascinating reading, even for geneticists (male and female).

H. F. Linskens, Nijmegen