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Book Review

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Book Reviews

BIOMEDICAL POLITICS. (Kathi E. Hanna, ed., National Academy Press 1991) [352 pp.] Preface and acknowledgements, Carl W. Gottschalk, Chair, Institute of Medicine Committee to Study Biomedical Decision Making. Appendices, biographical notes on authors and commentators, index, notes, references. LC 91-18394, ISBN 0-309-04486-3. [Cloth \$29.95. Export \$36.00. 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington DC 20418.]

Six studies of cases chosen by Institute of Medicine Committee to Study Biomedical Decision Making to illustrate the complexity and evolution of decision making related to the diffusion and adoption of advances in biomedicine constitute the heart of this book. The cases chosen were: (1) the unproven AIDS therapy dideoxyinosine; (2) RU-486, a drug furnishing an alternative to early abortions; (3) the Human Genome Project; (4) an entitlement program for victims of end-stage renal disease; (5) human fetal tissue transplantation; and (6) the restrictions on recombinant DNA research adopted at the Asilomar Conference. As explained by respective authors, their research materials varied widely, being based upon, e.g., interviews with involved individuals, planning documents, scientific and lay literature, meeting transcripts, and records from congressional debate.

The committee, itself, is also represented in an introduction, twelve commentaries written by committee members (two follow each case study), and a final chapter summarizing committee conclusions and suggestions for further research. Moreover, committee member Stanley Joel Reiser prepared a paper discussing the historical roles of the public and experts in biomedical policy controversies; this appears as an appendix.

Taken together, the studies in this book provide a good sample of the range of decision-making processes that have been used to resolve complex scientific and medical issues once they have been subjected to public scrutiny. The book is interesting and well written — in language easily understandable by a wide audience. Also, the commentaries were designed to keep the overall presentation of each topic as objective as

possible.

BIOMEDICAL POLITICS demonstrates that important biomedical decisions are at least as much influenced by chance, fate and politics as they are by the merits. This book is highly recommended to anyone interested in how public controversies over highly technical subject matter may be resolved — whether or not the subject matter be, in any sense, biomedical.

Each topic could easily be the subject of a book as long as this one,* but such a span of pages would defeat its purpose. Nevertheless, it is recommended to anyone seeking an even-handed summary of any of the addressed controversies, and those seeking further information will find the reference lists helpful.

Gianna Julian-Arnold†

* See, e.g., reviews of THE CODE OF CODES..., *infra* at 261 and RISKY BUSINESS..., *infra* at 261 [ed.].

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