In the early 1980s when AIDS was first being recognized and named, the resultant panic in the United States focused not only on a fear of male homosexuals as one of the primary groups affected by the syndrome but also on Haitian immigrants as another, thereby fueling a growing anti-immigrant sentiment. The timely appearance of this new collection edited by Marks and Worboys reminds us that such fears linking the spread of diseases with the perception of racial or ethnic differences (or of other social distinctions) are not at all new, but that, in fact, they have a very long historical trajectory.

The introduction, by Marks and Worboys, makes this point well. If the introduction suffers from any single weakness, it is that its authors allow themselves to become bogged down in a semantic and tongue-tripping discussion of the distinctions between the terms, ‘immigrant’, ‘migrant’ and ‘ethnic minority’. The primary message of the introduction and of the collection as a whole, however, is that notions of sickness and health have been inextricably linked with ideas about social differences, whether or not such differences are associated with such phenotypic traits as skin colour. Other groups who are not necessarily glossed in terms of racial or ethnic categories, including (among others) intravenous drug users, the urban poor, homosexuals, criminals, and prostitutes, have also come under the scrutiny of medical experts during various historical periods, suspected of harbouring some sort of organic defect responsible for producing their supposedly ‘deviant’ behaviours.

Indeed, as other contributors show, not all contemporary ethnic differences need be racialized. The chapter by Liam Greenslade, Moss Madden and Maggie Pearson documents the case of an invisible ‘white’ population, the Irish in England, who also suffer many of the same health-related disadvantages of more marked ‘black’ immigrant populations.

The collection’s co-editors also argue that ‘[l]ideas of ethnicity and race are shown to have been shaped by, and to have themselves influenced, the construction of medical ideas and the development of health services’ (p. 1), a perspective well described by one of the collection’s contributors, Alan M. K. Raut, as ‘medicalised prejudice’ (p. 228). In fact, ideas about the presumed disease-ridden quality of ‘others’ were part and parcel of the underlying rationality of colonialism, as is illustrated in both Desmond M. Anderson’s chapter on the position of the Chinese in nineteenth century Australia and in Lenore M. Anderson’s chapter on the Chinese in early twentieth-century Malaya. Richard M. Eckel’s contribution also deals with an issue in that same historical period: that of the intersection in the US between the concern about high rates of infant mortality and racist notions that attributed higher mortality rates among African
Americans to ‘the physiological and behavioural traits inherent to the African race,’ rather than to such factors as poverty, discrimination, lack of access to health care and other social and environmental conditions (p. 73). The issue of maternal and infant welfare has historically been linked to the rise of ideas about eugenics and is also treated in a chapter by Lara Marks and Lisa Hilder, in which they compare infant mortality rates among Jewish immigrants to East London at the turn of the century, with those of more recent Bengali arrivals to those same districts. Marks and Hilder argue that both Jews and Bengalis had what they call ‘ethnic advantages’ that actually conferred to their offspring a relative advantage to their chances of survival in comparison with their equally impoverished contemporaries.

In fact, several contributors to the collection demonstrate that immigrant groups actually may enjoy some health advantages over other populations in their new settings. Writing about Greek migrants in Australia, John Powles notes that not only did the Greeks enjoy lower risks of heart disease than did the host population, but also that as the healthful Mediterranean diet, with its reliance on olive oil and high consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, became popular among other Australians, their chances of avoiding cardiac and circulatory diseases also improved.

Despite the Western stereotypes of ‘diseased savages’ that inhabited the imagination of Europeans, historically, as Mark Harrison and Michael Worboys point out in their chapter on tuberculosis in Britain, Africa and India in the years between 1900 and 1939, it was the European colonists’ own actions in transforming other environments that produced, as they put it, ‘the tuberculisation of the indigenous populations of Africa and India’ (p. 117).

Lindsey Harrison’s chapter on government policy and the health status of aboriginal Australians makes a similar point in a different cultural and historical context: that is, that the forced assimilation of this population, particularly with respect to dietary habits, has resulted in a significantly lower life expectancy for Aboriginal people in comparison with that of other Australians.

Alan M. Kraut’s very interesting chapter provides an historical perspective on the present re-emergence of drug-resistant tuberculosis in the US by looking back at the association of tuberculosis with southern Italian immigrants to the US at the turn of the century. Kraut shows how more recently (unlike in the case of AIDS and in contrast to his own comparative example of the situation of Italian immigrants a century ago) one health official in California in the mid-1990s actively fought against the public’s tendency to associate tuberculosis with any particular ethnic or national group.

The other theme treated by the contributors to this volume is the importance of medical pluralism. In his chapter on Bangladeshis in contemporary East London, John Eade argues that despite the growing multicultural character of Britain, Western biomedical ideas about health and illness continue to predominate over the cultural perspectives of other groups, further alienating immigrant groups from access to health care. Similarly, Maggie Brady, Stephen Kunitz and David Nash document the conflicts between the World Health Organization’s ideas about health and those held by Aboriginal Australians, noting that these differences are fought out on a political terrain that ultimately compromises the well-being of minority populations.

On the whole, this collection articulates well with current debates on ‘race’ and ethnicity. As anthropologists and others have shown, our notions of ‘race’ and ethnicity are based on social rather than on biological realities, and have little or
nothing to do with the ‘scientific’ ability to separate human populations into discrete categories and clearly defined gene pools. If the collection evidences any one deficiency, it is that it does not present any startlingly original theoretical perspectives on the issues it addresses. Nonetheless, it provides a very solid set of case studies which demonstrate that issues of race and ethnicity and their intersections with questions about health and illness are now – and have long been – informed by cultural considerations and are primarily driven by social, political and economic imperatives. In illustrating that interaction, this book makes a worthy contribution to the project of dismantling the intellectual structures that serve to undergird those hierarchies of inequality based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion and immigrant status that are the cause of so many disparities in the health statuses of various populations, within particular countries as well as on a global scale.

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A book with the words ‘gender’, ‘identity’, and ‘power’ constituting much of its title would at once seem to be at the cutting edge of contemporary anthropology and also indistinguishable from dozens of others vying for our shelf space. This is the first in a series of planned anthologies that will revisit the major cultural and historical themes emerging from papers published during the last decade in the interdisciplinary journal Food and Foodways. The editors identify their goal as the exploration of how ‘food’ (that most anthropological of tropes whose study has in recent years been conducted largely by practitioners of the other social sciences) reinforces and undercuts social relations of gender, identity and power in various cultural contexts. They wisely confine themselves to two crucial questions, one fairly simple, the other dauntingly complex. These are: how the control of food production, distribution and consumption can provide a framework for the gendered location of power and give meaning to social position; and how food symbolism informs and articulates notions of gender identity and the social values inherent in constructions of female and male. Their selection provides some rich ethnographic examples from a range of cultural settings, ends with three reviews of the complexity and history of Western women’s relationship with food and is most successful at dealing with the first question.

Early chapters suggest different ways food ideology functions to mitigate the contradictions between gender roles so as to render them both culturally valid. In an elegant exposition of symbolic analysis Donald Pollack argues that despite marked sexual division of labour among the Culina of Amazonia and identification of women and men with the products of their labour (garden vegetables and hunted meat respectively) an ideology of food exchange among the sexes within marriage confounds any structural tendency for a strong gender hierarchy to emerge. Miriam Kahn finds the gendered symbolism of foods among the Wamira of Papua New Guinea constrains
the adoption of imported foods for social but not political feasts. A political economic model suggests that symbolic parallels drawn between taro, a staple loaded with masculine symbolism, and children effectively equalize the power relations of men and women because they underscore the importance of women in producing taro and the role of men in producing children. Women can deploy their control of food and its symbolic associations in the manipulation of supernatural forces, which increases their power in relation to men. Kathryn March’s rich material on the religious intercession of Tamang and Sherpa women in Nepal explores the female symbolism in the types of offerings, particularly beer and other alcoholic preparations, made to the gods during Buddhist ritual, and links this to the unusually powerful cultural model of hospitality exchange operating within these communities. Van Esterik discusses how women in Thailand negotiate the internal contradictions they experience when they offer food to Buddhist monks. She suggests ways in which cooking and eating ‘cut across the oppositions of domestic and monastic, this world and other world and Great Tradition and Little Tradition’, which are often emphasized in studies which focus only on men’s religious action. Thus, through their giving of food and the concomitant manipulation, creation and recreation of complex symbolic categories, women in South-East Asia engage in a rich religious practice.

These case studies are nicely contrasted with three discussions of Western women’s relationship to food. Counihan’s historical anthropological argument that prodigious fasting has functioned as a means for women to exert control where cultural values are dominated by men is accompanied by her insightful reviews of five influential books on US women and body image published between 1978 and 1983. This is followed by McIntosh and Zey’s more sociological discussion of the fundamental inequality of food exchanges between men and women in bisexual American households. The latter authors argue convincingly that women’s ‘responsibility’ as food providers and ‘gatekeepers’ of food allocated within households does not function as a cultural model adequate to parallel the ‘control’ men exert, partly through the inherent subordination which occurs when women attempt to satisfy the constructed needs of others.

By definition, any anthology of previously published work offers little new material to specialists, but this collection is concise, relevant to the important questions the editors pose, and includes varied material. Some poor grammar and typos in the originals remain unedited. It is a pity that a new review of the major books on women and body image published in the last decade was not included. The introductory editorial chapter by Counihan does a nice job of outlining why food is a useful analytic construct central to understanding how cultural models of gender, production and reproduction operate and how control over the material and symbolic aspects of food translates into various forms of power. However, by focusing explicitly on issues of gender, each of the analyses included fails to capture information on the possible diversity in food production activities and material or symbolic power among individuals of similar gender identity. By privileging simple gender distinctions over individual agency, other questions about the ways power is contested within broad gender roles (what biologists might refer to as conscious and unconscious sexually selected behaviour) remain unexplored.

Perhaps some of these issues will be treated in more depth in future volumes in this promising series. Given the dearth of texts and readers focused on the symbolic aspects
of nutritional anthropology the volume is well suited for students seeking an introduction to the literature on food and culture, and is perhaps more accessible than Counihan and van Esterik's recent edited volume Food and Culture (Routledge, 1997). Moreover, since one is lucky to discover even a partial series of Food and Foodways in most university libraries, this volume will be useful even to those who may have been following the food and culture literature for some years by making these papers available in one affordable source.

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This collection of selected readings from essays on the economics of population by distinguished authors across the past 220 years was published on the bicentenary of the provocative and still oft discussed 'Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society' by Thomas Malthus. The editor is clear to state in his introduction that the economics of population has had a long and controversial history, intertwined as it continues to be, with popular debate and public policy. The volume is an extremely readable distillation of views. These readings, taken from larger works, cannot be understood by the non-historian without proper context, and the editor's introduction provides some historical background to the debates surrounding the chosen works. However, it is not clear what the potential audience for this volume is. If it is meant for students to read, then a more comprehensive introduction is needed. If it is aimed at professional historical demographers, it is likely that they would be more attracted by original sources, and not extracts from them, as in this volume. Despite these criticisms, the book clearly shows changing thought in economic demography across a period of considerable social and economic change, and is a worthy read. It consists of five sections: The Classical Setting; The Economics of Population; Twentieth-Century Classicals on Consequences; Natural Resources; and The Determinants of Population Growth and Density.

The first section gives a selection of eight writings from the Classical period of economics. The first of these is a history of population theories by Joseph Spengler, who summarizes Ancient and Medieval views on population, and develops the positions of mercantilist schools of political economy which emphasized the economic, political and military advantages of large and growing populations. However, during the last half of the 18th century increasing numbers of writers rejected mercantilist doctrine and with it the long-established idea that population growth was advantageous, Thomas Malthus among them. The second selection advocates the use of demographic indicators for government policy and planning, by one of the early mathematical demographers, John Graunt. This is followed by 'Another Essay in Political Arithmetic' by demographer William Petty, who discusses the notion of appropriate population size. Using London as an example, the author considers the right size of this city for defence, the administration of justice, reasonable taxation of
the people, gain by foreign commerce, improved transport, minimization of numbers of beggars and thieves, the advancement and propagation of useful learning, and the prevention of plagues and contagions. Most of these topics are likely to tax the mind of any future Lord Mayor of London, much as they were likely to have done in earlier times. Following this is an extract of an ‘Enquiry Concerning Political Justice’ by William Godwin. This very short piece is appropriately placed, since it was reaction to Godwin that stimulated Malthus’ essay of 1798. Godwin firmly believed that ‘myriads of centuries of still increasing population may pass away, and the earth be yet found sufficient for the support of its inhabitants’, and that the future of humankind will be a utopian one, where health is improved, longevity is increased, with the progressive advancement of virtue and good, in which the passion between the sexes will be extinguished. In starkest contrast is the 5th extract which follows it. This is from the first edition of Malthus’ ‘An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society’. Malthus was clearly opposed to population growth. Unlike Godwin, Malthus did not believe that the passion between the sexes would be extinguished. Rather, this was the engine that would lead to poverty and famine, as population, which Malthus identified as growing in geometric progression, would outstrip food production, which he stated as increasing in linear manner. Malthus tempered his views with later editions of this essay which feature important revisions. The weakness of his original argument was quickly discovered by Godwin, who pointed out that the labouring classes in civilized countries maintained themselves at levels above the minimum for existence without either positive checks (war, famine, disease) or preventive checks (misery and vice). In the second edition of his essay, Malthus introduced the idea of a new preventive check – ‘moral restraint’ – which involved the postponement of marriage accompanied by strict sexual continence before marriage, to allow for the possibility of increased standard of living among the poorer classes. The next selection gives extracts from the revised 2nd edition of Malthus’ essay, in which the latter revision is incorporated, and from the 5th edition, in which evidence of prudential check to marriage in various European countries is given. The selection which follows is from William Godwin’s ‘Of Population’, in which Malthus’ thesis of the 1st edition is challenged. Godwin postulates that if population is kept down by the narrow limits within which the means of subsistence are confined, then the restraint that brings this about is due to civil institutions, and inequality of access to land and property. The final selection of this section, from David Ricardo’s ‘The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation’, introduces ideas of population growth, expansion of capital and well-being for the labouring classes.

Part two of the volume – ‘The second wave’ – continues the debate for and against population growth, post-Malthus and Godwin. Selections 9 and 11, selections from Alexander Everett’s ‘New Ideas on Population with Remarks on the Theories of Malthus and Godwin’, and Simon Gray’s ‘The Happiness of States, or an Inquiry Concerning Population’, are extremely combative of Malthus’ view that population growth should be kept in check. Everett states that population increase should not be feared, since it allows increased specialization of labour, and increased abundance of the products of labour. Everett’s view of population growth was in harmony with increased colonization of overseas territories and trade, then current. Gray postulated that increased population is the great predisposing cause of wealth in a nation, and
modes of employment are the machinery by which this operates. Lodged between these two readings is a brief summary, by William Peterson, of the substantial differences between the economic demographic positions of Malthus and Gray. The onslaught against Malthus continues in the next reading from Henry Carey’s ‘Principles of Political Economy, Volume 1’. He argues that with increased capital, population increases, and with it security (including food security), the inequality between the labourer and the capitalist is reduced, and more time becomes available for the cultivation of the mind. Carey’s idealism led him to believe that ‘as moral improvement keeps pace with that which takes place in physical condition, the virtues of civilisation replace the vices of a savage life’.

John Stuart Mill’s ‘Principles of Political Economy’ (1848) provides the basis of the next reading. In this, he takes Malthus’ side against population increase: ‘population almost everywhere treads close on the heels of agricultural improvements, and effaces its effects as fast as they are produced . . .’. In contrast, Friedrich Engels argues in favour of population growth in the reading that follows: ‘science . . . grows in geometrical progression, much as population does, in large part as a consequence of population growth, and that productivity and wealth may be increased manifold by the application of new knowledge’. Henry George, in the subsequent reading, also argues against Malthus, stating that ‘Beast, insect, bird, and fish take only what they find. Their increase is at the expense of their food . . . unlike that of any other living thing, the increase of man involves the increase of his food’. George considers Malthusian theory to be ‘eminently soothing and reassuring to the classes who, wielding the power of wealth, largely dominate thought’. Thus, ‘Malthusian doctrine parries the demand for reform, and shelters selfishness from question . . .’. The final reading of this section, from Charles Fourier’s ‘Design for Utopia’, pleads for population control.

Part three of the volume contains readings from the early 20th century on the consequences of population change. Here the historical focus changes, since Britain and many industrialized nations were undergoing, or had undergone, demographic transitions from high fertility, high mortality populations, to low fertility, low mortality ones. John Maynard Keynes, writing on ‘Population and Unemployment’, considers the implications of demographic change for employment, and the support of an increasingly elderly population. In the next reading, from ‘The Changed Outlook in Regard to Population’ by Edwin Cannan, the demographic transition in Britain is described, and the positive benefits of a stationary population expounded. Here, the population doom-saying of Malthus is seen as irrelevant to the Western countries, as is the emphasis on food production, which is predicted to require a smaller and smaller number of workers to raise food for the whole population. However, Cannan agrees with John Stuart Mill that population increase should not be allowed to reach its natural ceiling, whatever that be, if only for aesthetic reasons. The reading which follows is an extract from ‘Notes on Some Probable Consequences of the Advent of a Stationary Population in Great Britain’ written by Lionel Robbins in 1928. The consequences considered here include reduced occupational flexibility of the workforce, and the power of the population to satisfy its demands for manufactured goods. In the next reading, John Maynard Keynes, in ‘Some Economic Consequences of a Declining Population’ argues for increased consumption to be stimulated by more equal distribution of income and lowering of interest rates, to counterbalance the effect of
potential declining population on demand for manufactured goods. Alvin Hansen, in the subsequent reading (Economic Progress and Declining Population Growth), argues for more rapid advance of technology and the development of new industries than in the past if maintenance of full employment is desired in the new demographic landscapes of Western countries in the mid 20th century. The following reading, from ‘The Number of Members as Determining the Sociological Form of the Group’ by Georg Simmel, considers various social formations of past and present populations, and the economic consequences of these formations.

Part four is concerned with natural resources. The first reading of this section, from ‘The Coal Question’ by W. Stanley Jevons, while interesting, is concerned totally with resource extraction and not population, and is out of place in this volume. In the next reading, from John M. Keynes ‘The Economic Consequences of Peace’, the economics of population growth prior to 1914 are described. Keynes suggests that Malthusian thought had come to the fore again with the onset of the Great War. In this, he argues that the great events of history are often due to secular changes in the growth of population and fundamental economic causes associated with them. The next reading, from ‘The Isolated State’ by Johann Heinrich van Thunen (1826), is wrongly placed chronologically, and would more appropriately be in Part one. In this, the author considers the effect of population density and distribution on prosperity.

The volume finishes with Part five, ‘The Determinants of Population Growth and Density’, which has two readings, both from Malthus, the first from the first edition of ‘An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society’, the second from the second edition.

The editor, by selective use of important essays and texts across the ages, allows the authors to speak for themselves; old words breathe fresh again. All readings are short, some being less than two pages. This encourages browsing, and makes it an ideal bedtime book. However, with this approach to the volume the reader would be denied the occasional shock that the juxtaposition of certain texts presents when read back to back. In this, the editor is to be congratulated in recreating some of the freshness that these texts must have imparted in their day. This book is a delight, and deserves readership beyond specialist audiences of demographers, historians and economists.

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The mind and its evolution has suddenly come to the fore. Where we once pondered the significance of dusty bones, and perhaps made a few passing assertions about ecology, it has now become fashionable to ponder the inner mental processes of our long-dead ancestors. Scholars of the past (and probably some of those still with us) will no doubt be turning in their graves. Nonetheless, no fashion is without substance and the opportunities that the last decade has offered us to dabble in the evolution of mind are unparalleled in the history of human evolutionary research.
This book draws together a group of psychologists and linguists in an effort to give some sense of what insights into human evolution our current state of knowledge has to offer. Not only are there neuroanatomists (Corballis, Beran et al.), but there is also an array of scholars that one would not normally associate with such an endeavour. Psychologists like Baron-Cohen (whose work focuses on autism), Thiessen (whose usual pastures are human mate choice), Byrne and Whiten (cognition and development in primates) rub shoulders with linguists like Bloom, MacNeilage, Lock and King et al. Each tells his or her own story of what their discipline has to offer, but the focus is always on the evolution of the human mind. In that respect, the editors have done a surprisingly good job at pulling together a degree of thematic coherence (given the fact that most of the contributors are not usually given to speculations in this area).

Reviewing a book like this is always difficult, because one is invariably over-influenced by the contributors from one’s own field or by what seems like a new and refreshing contribution from an unfamiliar discipline. That having been said, I think the chapter I found most enlightening was the editors’ introduction – if only because it set the scene on the evolving conflict between behaviourism and cognitivism that has characterized the last century of comparative psychology. For an outsider to this debate, this chapter provides a succinct overview that goes a long way to explaining current thinking in this area. The major shift into a more cognitive stance (that animals as well as humans have mental states) opens up the possibility of advanced forms of cognition such as theory of mind (the ability to understand the mind-states of other individuals) and the so-called ‘intentional stance’ that lie at the very heart of human experience.

With that kind of understanding, we can begin to ask more sensible questions about just how animal minds differ from human minds and when, during the long course of human evolution, these particular changes occurred. The views expressed in this book are as divergent as one would expect from any group of scholars, but the encouraging point is that psychology is being brought into the debate within archaeology for the first time. It would be invidious to single out some chapters at the explicit expense of others, since all the chapters are of a uniformly high standard and each offers a perspective of its own intrinsic interest. In any case, a full review of what every chapter has to offer is inevitably beyond the scope of a short review. That having been said, let me conclude by alluding briefly to a couple of other chapters that I particularly enjoyed.

One of these was Merlin Donald’s examination of the preconditions for the evolution of language. He emphasizes two important preconditions. One was the improved voluntary motor control that underpinned memesis (the ability to mimic actions) which allowed ancestral hominids to vary and elaborate on basic primate vocalizations. As some have previously argued, this might have been aided by the development of aimed throwing and the demands for fine motor control that this demanded. The second was a capacity for abstract modelling or planning, a feature that appears to be all but unique to humans. This would have been essential for the construction of lexicons out of basic sounds. The other chapter that I particularly enjoyed was by Thomas Suddendorf on ‘the rise of the metamind’, if only because of its very comprehensive review of the last decade’s research on human social cognition.
(theory of mind and related topics). Between them, these and the other chapters in this book serve to open up exciting new dimensions in the study of human evolution.

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This comprehensive volume appears at a time when many bemoan the decline of ethical and moral standards. Paul Lawrence Farber, the Distinguished Professor of the History of Science at Oregon State University, points out in his book that the roots of this crisis of values reach back to the mid-nineteenth century, the time when science undermined the religious view of the world amongst the learned public, while being unable to substitute a code of conduct as strong and coherent as that based on metaphysics.

The book opens with the review of the contributions to ethics made by Charles Darwin. These consisted of showing plausibly the evolutionary origin of human moral sentiment and of establishing its adaptive value. Darwin’s argument was simple: humans evolved like other animals through natural selection. This included mental evolution that produced higher faculties including moral sensibilities. Morally correct actions were those contributing to the ‘general good’ of the community. An approach to ethics from the perspective of natural history had an intellectual appeal to rational minds. Among these were two Cambridge graduates: William Kingdon Clifford and Leslie Stephen. Clifford argued that social efficiency was a measure of right and wrong. Stephen was influenced by the utilitarian philosophy of John Stuart Mill, although he did not agree with all its tenets. He was searching for a rational justification of existing morality rather than trying to establish a new system. Stephen related individual behaviour to social context and thus considered morality a result of group selection.

A significant place in the book is given to the work of Herbert Spencer, perhaps the best known of ‘evolutionary ethicists’. Spencer produced the vision of progressive social evolution leading to the Utopian industrial society based on mutual aid rather than on competition. Unlike Darwin, who simply sought explanations for the origin of moral sentiment, Spencer was trying to establish evolutionary justification for social idealism and in this way to construct ‘strictly scientific morality’.

The search for evolutionary ethics in the second half of the 19th century was criticized by philosophers and even by evolutionary scientists. Prominent among them were Thomas Henry Huxley and Alfred Russel Wallace. Huxley maintained that humans, although a product of evolutionary forces, were reaching beyond the constant struggle and change in nature to produce stability and permanence. This could be presented as a conflict between humans and nature, between primitive instincts and cultural ideas. Wallace, like Huxley, saw the duality of humans and nature. He even stated that with human mental advance natural selection ceased to operate on the human body. Wallace’s firm belief in spiritualism contributed to his opinion that natural selection cannot account for human moral and mental faculties. The views of
the two evolutionists reflected the general opinion of contemporary philosophers: that ethics and morality are higher human phenomena that cannot be produced by natural evolution.

The lines of thought that emerged in the 19th century continued to be pursued with some modifications throughout the 20th century. Julian Huxley, the grandson of Thomas Henry, provides the best example. This architect of modern evolutionary synthesis, like his grandfather, saw a discontinuity between animal evolution and human conduct, the departure of culture beyond simple biological development. Other architects of the modern synthesis – George Gaylord Simpson and Theodosius Dobzhansky – similarly maintained that there was no possibility of deriving ethical standards from evolutionary history.

Edward O. Wilson’s 1975 book Sociobiology opened the last chapter in the reappraisal of evolutionary ethics. It stressed the genetic basis of social behaviour. Yet again, however, the nature/humanity dualism raised its head. Although most sociobiologists state that there is an evolutionary continuity between animals and humans, they also believe that culture is largely a specifically human property. Even Richard Dawkins admits that genes and ‘memes’ (cultural units) may act in opposition to each other.

At the threshold of the 21st century there is still no answer as to what we can base our ethical and moral codes on. Science, so triumphant in many other areas, has failed to provide firm answers to the central question of how we should conduct ourselves with respect to each other and to the world. This failure leads to environmental destruction, to continuing military conflicts and to increasing crime rates. It seems that the reason for this dismal state of affairs is the current focus of scientific activities on intellectually easy, and financially profitable, achievements in medicine and technology and neglect of the intellectually demanding issue of the understanding of ourselves.

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Infant and child mortality in low-income countries remains terribly high, with an estimated 12.4 million deaths occurring among children less than 5 years old each year. The majority of these deaths are due to acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, measles, malaria and malnutrition and, until recently, it was widely held by international agencies such as WHO and UNICEF that the single most effective way to prevent these deaths was through the deployment of disease-specific control programmes (such as the administration of vitamin A capsules, immunization programmes etc).

This supplement represents a major shift in the outlook of staff employed by these international agencies. It acknowledges the limits of many selective biomedical interventions and suggests that deaths among infants and children could be further
Averted by the application of simple drug treatments at first-level health posts. Accurate diagnosis is, of course, vital for this strategy to succeed. It is also difficult to achieve as diagnostic facilities and training are often inadequate. Moreover, children frequently attend health facilities with more than one infection and, to compound these difficulties, there are often similarities in the signs and symptoms of the most deadly diseases. To avoid the administration of inappropriate drugs, the WHO, UNICEF and others have devised clinical guidelines for the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) at first-level health facilities.

This supplement describes how these guidelines (which are usually presented on four wall charts) have been developed and the extent to which they have been successfully deployed by health workers in seven countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, United Republic of Tanzania, the Gambia, Uganda and Bangladesh. On the basis of the work undertaken in these countries it is suggested that they can reduce significantly infant and child mortality in low-income countries. That said, other interventions are also planned as part of the IMCI strategy. These include endeavours to improve the supply of drugs at first-level health facilities, attempts to alter family behaviours that promote or exacerbate ill-health, as well as the development of additional guidelines to improve the care of patients in hospitals.

In summary, the IMCI strategy is ambitious and well-intentioned. It remains to be seen whether it can bring about long-term and sustainable reductions in overall infant and child mortality. Sadly, there are reasons to be cautious: it cannot be assumed that first-level health care facilities are the first port of call for parents with sick children. The anthropological literature repeatedly shows that health-seeking behaviour is complex and diverse and while the proponents of IMCI have usefully sought ways to enhance communication between parents and carers in health care facilities, this is clearly just one part of a very complex equation. That said, the articles presented in the supplement illustrate with clarity and lucidity a new and important WHO/UNICEF initiative to reduce infant and child mortality. Let us hope that they succeed.

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