acting as a deterrent. Evolutionary biologists have a relatively leisurely life when it comes to reading the current literature, with a handful of relevant journals producing perhaps 50–60 papers a month in all, but molecular biologists might be

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faced with five times as many. A new publication will clearly have to offer something extra to attract the attention of the beleaguered molecular biologist. Some pointers can be found among the more successful journals covering the subject — large formats, which allow bigger, better produced figures and tables; distinguishing the results from the materials and methods section by position or typeface; and, finally, quick publication.

Molecular Biology and Evolution falls down in these respects. Some of the illustrations have been quite clear, but others have been cramped, and some DNA sequences have been very poorly reproduced. The small page size and lack of distinction between sections makes it difficult to jump to the key results of a piece of work. And six months, which seems to be the norm, is now a long time between acceptance and publication. While the subscription price is much more attractive, these adverse points will not have helped the journal to establish itself alongside the *Journal of Molecular Evolution*. □

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Heredity in disorder

D. F. Roberts

Genetic Epidemiology. Editor-in-chief D. C. Rao. *Alan R. Liss. 4/yr. North America $190 (institutional), $90 (individual); elsewhere $213 (institutional), $113 (individual).*

THE first reference to epidemiology in the genetic context seems to have been in *Human Heredity* (1954), where Neel and Schull pointed out its value in helping clarify the contributions of heredity and environment to the aetiology of a disorder. This is one of the reasons given for the launch of *Genetic Epidemiology*, a term more frequently used in North America than in Europe. Other reasons are to help in the interpretation of our increasing knowledge of DNA structure, and in understanding the genetic effects of the introduction into the environment of potentially mutagenic agents.

An appreciable proportion of the papers in the four issues of Vol. 1 are in the first category, for example that on the measurement of the genetic contribution to breast cancer in Denmark, but only one deals with a DNA probe and none relates specifically to mutational effects. The general content is wider. Some papers, for example one on coeliac disease, are based on heterogeneous samples from several populations, are concerned exclusively with genetic analysis and have little epidemiological content. There are several, too, that are theoretical in nature, concerned with techniques rather than their application, and have little claim to be of particular relevance to genetic epidemiology.

These articles — indeed all of the contributions in the first volume — would not have been out of place in many of the established journals on human genetics. Why then introduce a new one? Neel (p. 6) points out that *Genetic Epidemiology* will provide a common forum for all those whose various interests impinge on the subject. But Motulsky (p. 144) sounds a word of caution: this new journal should not result in the erection of barriers

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around a small group of researchers who use complex methods which they alone understand, and who do not communicate with biological and medical workers.

The papers are of varying lengths, but of a uniformly high standard. Despite the rigorous refereeing procedure, Vol. 1 (published in 1984) includes articles accepted up to September of that year, so obviously processing of manuscripts is prompt. The quality of production is rather better than some of the other Alan Liss titles, but the journal is not particularly cheap.

Genetic Epidemiology will perform a valuable function if it concentrates on material that is strictly concerned with the subject implied by its title. If it is broader in scope, as the first volume is, it may also be useful in relieving the pressure on established journals. Certainly, given the quality of the articles published to date, it deserves to succeed. □

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Autumn books

Nature's next review supplement is Autumn books, which appears on 14 November. Among the books to be reviewed are *Vaulting Ambition* (by Philip Kitcher); *The Joy of Science* (by Carl J. Sindermann); *Einstein in America* (by Jamie Sayen); *The Dialectical Biologist* (by Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin); *Seven Clues to the Origin of Life* (by A.G. Cairns-Smith); *Superpower Games* (by Steven J. Brams); and *The World Food Problem 1950 – 1980* (by David Grigg).

Into ultrastructure

Audrey Glauert

Journal of Electron Microscopy Technique. Editor-in-chief John E. Johnson, Jr. *Alan R. Liss. 8/yr. North America $175 (institutional), $85 (individual); elsewhere $199 (institutional), $109 (individual).*

ELECTRON microscopy is flourishing and continues to make major contributions to our understanding of the ultrastructure of materials of diverse origin, from moon dust to the biological macromolecules which are fundamental to living processes. A basic core of techniques is now well established but there has never ceased to be expansion in the scope of electron microscopy, resulting from the development of new instruments and advances in their mode of operation, and from the increasing sophistication of methods for image analysis and for preparing specimens for examination.

In this sense, electron microscopy is still a young science with a consequent need of a vigorous journal literature to disseminate technical information quickly and as widely as possible. This task is ably performed by established publications (such as the *Journal of Microscopy, Micron and Microscopica Acta* and *Ultramicroscopy*) and so there arises the inevitable question — why yet another journal?

As its title declares, the aim of the *Journal of Electron Microscopy Technique* is to publish detailed articles on methods in electron microscopy. The danger for such a journal is that it may become an outlet for second-rate papers describing results with little methodology, and it is gratifying to see that this new publication has admirably followed its own guidelines so far. In this, however, it does not differ from existing journals. In particular it has much in common with the *Journal of Microscopy*, on which it appears to be modelled (a compliment for the latter; imitation is the sincerest form of flattery).

There will inevitably be some competition between the two journals but this may be no bad thing. The *Journal of Microscopy* is unique in that it gives equal weight to all forms of microscopy, so that it plays a leading role in those fruitful areas where light and electron microscopy meet. It attracts contributions from a wide range of countries, especially in Europe, while the *Journal of Electron Microscopy Technique* has already shown itself to be popular in North America. There are always advantages in publishing nearer home. If the *Journal of Electron Microscopy Technique* can maintain the high standards of these early issues it deserves to succeed. □

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