

of the historical influences on medicine by Henry Miller. References are appended to each discussion.

Dr Gordon McLachlan completes the postscript by saying that the symposium may prove to be the modest beginning of a movement towards a better understanding of problems common to all countries. It is by this standard that the book should be judged.

There were fourteen British and ten American participants in the seminar, most of whom were medically qualified, and the book, not unnaturally, reflects this pattern, for it discusses Anglo-American medical history and medical care. As the theme develops, from the evolution of medical practice to the measurement of economic benefits of health programmes, those with field experience in "developing" countries may find the gulf between the problems and resources there and those of the wealthy and sophisticated societies under scrutiny almost terrifying. It is going to be difficult to find common ground for future discussions, for the solutions must also be different.

The quality of the essays is uniformly high and the reader is not unduly distracted by the transition from English to American styles of writing. Some are controversial, notably those by McKeown. Others are monographs, complete in themselves, and Brotherton's essay on the general practitioner is an outstanding example of this. So also is Rashi Fein's contribution on the measurement of economic benefits of health services.

The purpose of the final essay by Henry Miller was to review those that preceded it and to seek pointers to forward planning. It is an amusing and at times devastating commentary on the proceedings which should be read in full, but it can be epitomized by his verdict that: "If anything is clear from this meeting it is that we cannot predict medical developments during the next fifteen years. How can we in all conscience return to our hospitals and put forward plans that claim to meet the needs of fifty years ahead?"

In short, this book is an authoritative record of the current anxieties and problems in the field of medical care in Britain and the United States of America.

A. LESLIE BANKS

Bioethics

Bioethics: Bridge to the Future. By Van Rensselaer Potter. Pp. xvii+205. (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. March 1971.) \$5.95 cloth, \$3.95 paper.

THERE is a need, apparently felt by a number of individuals who have had a long and productive research career, to

gather together in one place their thoughts on a variety of disparate topics. It is an easy way to build a book out of past material, labour saving and doubtless ego-gratifying for the author; presumably profitable for the publisher. If it is dressed up with a new and trendy title, the unwary will believe that the book is really a book and not a sort of *paella* made with the left-overs. There is of course nothing against reissuing one's minor or even seminal thoughts in this way; one recent book containing the collected views of a respected Chinese scientist-cum-political leader has reputedly sold into the millions. But I do feel that publishers should warn prospective purchasers that they should not buy on the assumption that here is a new book.

Disregarding, then, the pretentious title, what is one to make of this *pot-pourri*? Dr Potter is evidently a likeable, moral and concerned man; his thoughts radiate the common sense of the American liberal, convinced that "we need to compete with the communists in the field of ideas and not merely in the production of corn, hogs and missiles". His contribution to the competition is, on the one hand, a straight down-the-line defence of objectivity and scientific progress, conducted, however, without the clarity of Jacques Monod's *Le Hasard et la Nécessité*, and, on the other hand, an uneasy but undefined feeling that not all is well with the concepts. To bolster them comes "bioethics", a *mélange* of Teilhard de Chardin and ecological concern. If Dr Potter does not go all the way with those *Nature* has in the past described as the "econuts", and he is far too sound a man to thicken the air with doomful prognostications, he does believe in biological responsibility. . . . "An urgent task for bioethics is to seek biological agreement at the international level."

This is all very well intentioned but rather far from the real problems of contemporary society, which are not so much the accidental as the deliberate consequences of the application of science and technology. Thalidomide, happiness and Pandora's box all get references in the index. The Garden of Eden and the ethical revolution are there, but Vietnam and the military-industrial complex do not appear; the problems of the third world countries are encapsulated in the limp but scarcely acceptable conclusion that ". . . the United States, Western Europe and Russia are the materialistic giants while India is a country with essentially the religious attitude towards progress". One fears that Dr Potter's irony was at best unintentional.

There are some good things in the book, though unexpected simply insofar as it is difficult to predict anything about

its contents; two interesting chapters on an optimum environment for man, which draw on the author's own research; a parenthetical sideswipe at Jansenism; and a brave and intriguing first chapter. This chapter, although entitled misleadingly "Bioethics", is an attempt by Dr Potter, under the heavy and acknowledged influence of T. S. Kuhn's views on paradigms in science, to extract what he believes to be the twelve central paradigms of contemporary mechanistic biology, ranging, in hierarchical order, from those concerning molecular systems, to those of physiological adaptation. Whatever the merits of the Kuhnian analysis, this particular exercise is worthwhile, and could well be built in conceptually to the training of biologists, who need to be taught more clearly the epistemology of their subject as well as its "facts".

STEVEN P. R. ROSE

Nonscience

Nonscience . . . or How not to Rule the World. By Brian J. Ford. Pp. 206. (Wolfe: London, September 1971.) £2.00.

SOME of the elements of which *Nonscience*, by Brian J. Ford, is composed made me laugh aloud; others exasperated me to about the same degree. Its publishers promise us a satirical look at our age, and Mr Ford makes his intentions clear immediately. This is an age when "accepted codes of technological betterment may replace our notions of humanity"; but there is no sense in wanting to abolish technology, nor virtue in being anti-science. The enemy to be driven out is "pragmatic, self-fulfilling, narcissistic Nonscience", which Mr Ford defines in terms of its mechanics, its effects, its language—the stock-in-trade of a new breed of individual, "the expert".

The essential feature of the expert is absolute dedication to data (rather than to new ideas and imagination) which he uses omnisciently to substantiate whatever case happens at the time to promote his own standing, usually by its getting him into the public eye. The sarcasm may be pretty heavy, but Mr Ford has a point. What exasperated me was the stance he takes for establishing it in the first place—too chip on the shoulder; too studentish, as exemplified by students who get into the public eye by posturing as self-appointed members of a depressed class. One of Mr Ford's early swipes is at the people who do technical jobs in the Department of Trade and Industry. It matters less that he's wasting his energy than that he's showing an absence of grasp on how the world works. This will make his swipes seem the less to be worried about by the people who actu-