Brave New People

By D Gareth Jones. (Pp 221. £3.95.) Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press. 1984.

This book represents the well collected thoughts of Dr Gareth Jones, Professor of Anatomy in Otago, concerning the many complex issues surrounding recent developments in prenatal diagnosis, in vitro fertilisation, and genetic engineering. In making his points Professor Jones avoids sensationalism and over-dramatisation as he attempts to reconcile his deeply held religious convictions with compassion and scientific objectivity. In general, there is a refreshing absence of dogma although the text is sprinkled liberally with references from the Old and New Testaments.

This inexpensive book is easy to read and technically accurate. It combines philosophy and genetics without being too overwhelming on either score. Many will disagree with the author's views but few will question his sincerity and concern for the welfare of mankind. Professor Jones readily admits that he has not written as a practising doctor and one suspects that there is an element of the ivory tower in much of his thinking. While this is entirely appropriate in an intellectual treatise, it may not constitute ideal guidelines for those who are confronted on a daily basis by the practicalities of coping with a turbulent twentieth century.

I D YOUNG

Issues and Reviews in Teratology

Volume 2. Edited by Harold Kalter. (Pp 516; figures + tables. \$69.50.) New York: Plenum Press. 1984.

The second volume of this series is of a high standard. It consists of twelve comprehensive chapters on diverse aspects of teratology, many of which are in the form of review articles. The book is intended for readers actively working in the field of birth defects rather than for a general scientific audience, but its breadth of coverage will make it attractive to all teratologists.

The first chapter deals with the construction of various birth defects monitoring systems and describes the problems involved in devising effective malformation registers. The work of the International Clearinghouse is described. There follows a chapter on epidemiological criteria for assessing teratogenic risk. The conflicting forces of prudence in the interests of public safety and the scientific establishment of causality are pointed out here. A review chapter on congenital hydrocephalus in mice and its counterpart in man is next; besides describ-

ing the genetic background this thoroughly covers the pathogenesis of the condition. A chapter dealing with congenital malformations in domestic and feral animals introduces the importance of animal teratology in its own right rather than as a model for mimicking human pathology. This chapter has a particularly extensive bibliography. There follows a review article on transplacental exposure to diethylstilboestrol.

Robert Pratt reviews hormones, growth factors, and their receptors in normal and abnormal development. Although he deals largely with cleft palate it soon becomes clear that this is a growing point in experimental embryology and teratology and this contribution is, perhaps, the most stimulating one in the book for the laboratory experimentalist. A competent review of limb morphogenesis reminds the reader of how much is now known about limb formation and how, tantalisingly, this still contributes all too little to our understanding of limb defects. Another highlight is the comprehensive chapter on the teratogenic risks of exposure to industrial chemicals. There is much public misconception in this area and the well balanced treatment afforded the subject here is timely. There follows a critical assessment of the genetic effects of ionising radiation which exhaustively describes the pitfalls and difficulties involved in such studies. Finally, an ambitious review of selected therapeutic drugs attempts to delineate their risk to the conceptus from extant human and animal data. The evaluations made are sound and this contribution should provide a good reference source for some time in the future.

The book is well presented and can be recommended for the libraries of institutions with an interest in abnormal development.

FELIX BECK

Plasmid Technology

Methods in Microbiology. Volume 17. Edited by P M Bennett and J Grinstead. (Pp 331; figures + tables. £25.00.) Florida: Academic Press. 1984.

This book is volume 17 in a long-running series, 'Methods of Microbiology'. It contains 13 chapters on various aspects of plasmid biochemistry, ranging from their in vitro biological characteristics, through the analysis of their structure, to their uses in genetic manipulation experiments. Different types of naturally occurring plasmids are described, together with the characteristics they confer on their host bacteria and the ways in which they can be transferred between strains. Plasmids from organisms other