

## PUBLISHED VERSION

Henneberg, Maciej.

[Biologists and the promise of American life](#), Journal of Biosocial Science, 2003; 35 (4):623-624.

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9<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/32676>

The book opens with a fascinating historical perspective by Richard Semba on the interaction between nutrition and development, and is concluded with a thought-provoking essay by David Pelletier on the necessity to broaden current views on research and policy in order to best tackle the multidimensional problems in the field of public health and nutrition.

As with many multi-authored works, the writing style is a little uneven: there are some beautifully crafted entries, while there are others that are rather more laborious to read. There are also numerous examples of overlap between the chapters. Much of this overlap is stated by the editors to be 'purposeful', and is the result of the two-way interaction between nutrition and infection. However, some of the overlap is less interesting. For example, the NCHS/WHO reference data for child growth and the definitions of wasting and stunting are discussed on no less than three separate occasions. Many of the figures are also rather disappointing; some are too small for easy reading, while others have been poorly reproduced. However, all chapters are extensive and present abundant references: a superb fund of information for further reading.

The enormous scope and diversity of this book makes it an ideal resource for graduates and researchers in the fields of public health and nutrition. Indeed, the mixture of biological, clinical, demographic and social perspectives results in a book that will be of interest to readers from a wide range of disciplines. However, to be truly accessible to those who might need it most, such as health workers in developing countries, this book will need to be considerably cheaper!

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**Biologists and the Promise of American Life.** By Philip J. Pauly. Pp. 312. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA, 2001.) £18.95, ISBN 0-691-04977-7, hardback. DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003235501

In his new book, Philip J. Pauly, an historian of science, continues a theme established in his insightful *Controlling Life: Jaques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1987). The theme concerns the rise of the current approach to biology: a science controlling and changing life rather than describing nature. Although biology, like all natural sciences, purports to be an objective reflection of the natural world, it is in reality a reflection of our social attitudes in a series of examples taken from nature. Thus, the history and the social philosophy of the time and place determine the way in which a particular branch of science develops.

In this book, Philip Pauly presents the cultural history of American biology beginning in the early 19th century with the work of naturalists who 'discovered' the West – a vast universe of prairies, rivers and mountains – making it available for European conquest. Then comes the age of grand theories, prominent among them the Darwinian theory of evolution, and great personalities such as Asa Gray and Louis Agassiz, followed by attempts at applying biology for national development

through support for the national economy by government naturalists. Slowly biology finds its place in the US national culture, entering high school curricula and establishing its own centres of academic life, Woods Hole prominent among them. The early 20th century sees biology absorbed into the mainstream of national culture through eugenics and sex education, which lead to disparate results: the demise of eugenics and the development of effective methods of birth control and the sexual liberation of people of various sexual orientations. Later in the 20th century the drive towards application of biology in national life leads to the development of biotechnology, but the author stops there, well before the full impact of the governmental philosophy of directly applied science can be explored. He ends by indicating that biology differs from physical sciences by the depth of its involvement with public life. Products of biological research can affect directly bodies of millions of Americans, thus bringing bioethical issues to the fore of the public debate and establishing the presence of biologists in public life. The book is well referenced and illustrated, making it a useful and thought-provoking contribution to the understanding of the role of a natural science – biology – in shaping the culture of the modern world.

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**Obesity: Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic.** Report of a WHO Consultation. WHO Technical Report Series 894. Pp. 252. (World Health Organization, Geneva, 2000.) SFr 56.00, ISBN 92-4-120894-5, paperback.  
DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003245508

Obesity is currently one of the fastest emerging public health problems. By describing this emergence as an epidemic, the authors of this report use a tabloid newspaper device to draw attention to an issue that they see as being particularly pressing. Unlike most 'epidemics', this one has largely been met by public apathy, not action, perhaps because this is to some extent a condition of generalized affluence, a very new phenomenon in human history, and traditionally a marker of individual success in many societies.

However, while the title might over-dramatize the issue, there have been very consistent trends towards increased levels of fatness and obesity in many parts of the world, and there is clear need for public health activity to stabilize or reverse this trend. This report is the end product of the World Health Organization (WHO) Consultation on Obesity that met in 1997 to review current epidemiology of obesity and to prepare recommendations for the development of public health policies and programmes for the prevention and management of obesity.

The volume consists of five parts, the first of which reviews the literature on various definitions and classifications of obesity, and describes the global prevalence of obesity and secular trends in body fatness according to WHO regions: Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. In the second part, the health and economic consequences of overweight and obesity are considered, as are the health benefits and risks of weight loss. In part three, the Consultation on Obesity reviews