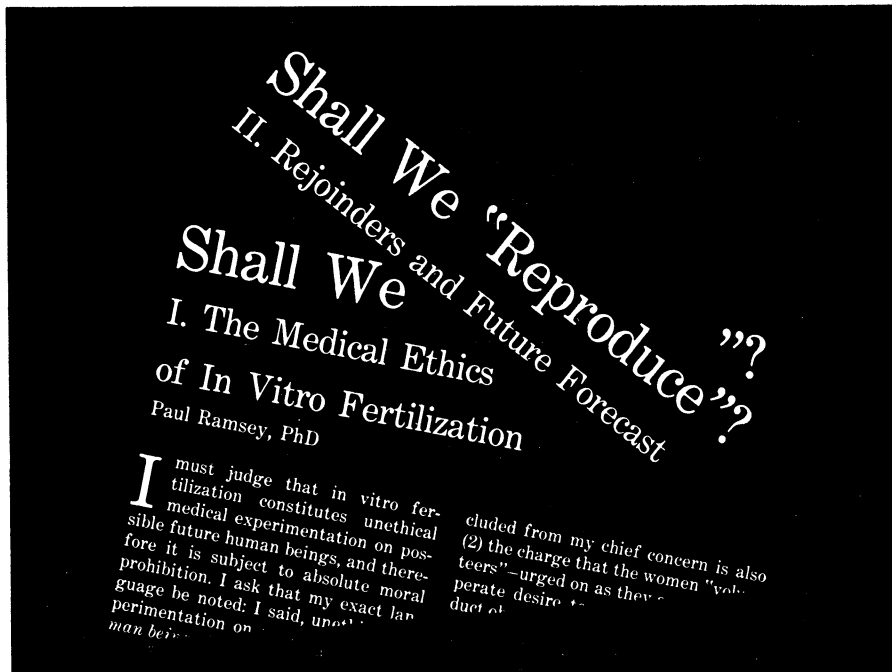


AMA: Ethical decisions in a power pocket



The grit of one of the nation's mightiest medical organizations, the American Medical Association, resides in the AMA Board of Trustees. What the board decides, the AMA House of Delegates usually endorses. The AMA also has some minor power pockets—15 to 20 councils. Recommendations from these councils are okayed by the AMA House of Delegates at least 90 percent of the time. Recently one of these councils, the Judiciary Council, decided to hammer out guidelines on seven medical-ethics subjects of growing concern to physicians and the public. As might be expected, this council is generating some interesting waves.

Actually the AMA has already taken positions on two of the subjects under review by the Judiciary Council—abortion and human experimentation. A physician is not supposed to perform an abortion unless he or she does so in an accredited hospital and consults with two other physicians. This position, endorsed by the AMA House of Delegates in June 1970, was considered shockingly liberal by many AMA members. In fact, the position came close to being tempered at the annual AMA convention last summer. As for human experimentation, the AMA has held, since November 1966, that no scientific experiments should be conducted on patients without their informed, voluntary consent and without considering the effects of the experiment on the patient's well being. Now the Judiciary Council is going beyond just reassessing the AMA's present positions on abortion and human experimentation in view of new scientific knowledge and changing public sentiment on the subjects. It is also

tackling five other medical questions: technological reproduction (test-tube babies); fertilization of a baby in vitro, then reimplanting it back into the mother's womb; genetic engineering, for example, adding viruses to patients' cells to change the genes in those cells; behavioral control, for example, psychosurgery; mercy killing.

The AMA has no official position on these subjects. However an editorial and several articles on the subjects have cropped up in the association's journal, JAMA, in recent weeks. First JAMA ran an editorial calling for a halt on in vitro creation of life and embryo reimplantation into the mother, until the ethics of such a scientific effort are carefully weighed (SN: 5/6/72, p. 295). Then, in the June 5 and 12 JAMA issues, two articles by Princeton theologian Paul Ramsey appear, stating that "in vitro fertilization and embryo transplantation" are "subject to absolute moral prohibition." As anyone in the editorial business knows, the selection of editorial material is rarely serendipitous. In fact, when an AMA staff member asked the AMA powers-that-be whether JAMA would be running articles presenting views for in vitro fertilization and embryo transplantation, she was told, "Not necessarily."

Thus, while the Judiciary Council and the AMA will probably not be taking official positions on test-tube babies, genetic engineering and the other questions at the annual AMA convention next week—in fact, will probably not do so for another year—one can get a pretty good idea of what positions are forthcoming. They are discretely, or not so discretely, being aired in JAMA. □

films OF THE WEEK

THE ANDES. 16mm, color, sound, 17 min. The Andes Mountains stretch 4,000 miles from the Caribbean coast of Venezuela to the southern tip of Chile. The film presents in visual terms the effects of geography on the economic development of this mountainous region (vast natural resources co-exist with severe economic underdevelopment), explores the differences in the Indian population, surveys the history of the region, and analyzes its vast potential. Audience: Junior and senior high. Purchase \$240 or rental \$22 from McGraw-Hill Films, Dept. SN, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CARDIO-VASCULAR SYSTEM OF THE CHICK: THE BLOOD VESSELS. 16mm, color, sound, 23 min. The formation of the blood vessel complex, which develops within and outside the embryonic body concurrently with the heart, is shown using normal speed and time-lapse photography and animation. In the concluding sequences, the film shows the main blood vessels as they appear in the heart of a 96-hour-old embryo. Audience: secondary, college, adult. Purchase \$315 or rental \$10 from Audio-Visual Center, Dept. SN, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

FAMILY OF THE BUSH: SON OF WARRIORS. 16mm, color, sound, 11 min. The Masai society of Kenya's bush country revolves around the almost totally self-sufficient family. Children are seen working directly with adults on a daily basis, assuming important responsibilities at an early age. The bright colors of the Masai dress and jewelry is contrasted against the subtle earth tones of their surroundings and the cyclic chores of their daily existence. The film is designed to introduce the viewer to basic family concepts while showing the differences and similarities in family life around the world. Audience: primary, intermediate. Purchase \$160 or rental \$16 from McGraw-Hill Films, Dept. SN, 330 West 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

SMALL CARS AND CRASHES. 16mm, color, sound, 23 min. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has recently carried out and filmed an exploratory series of head-on crash tests between six small, popular "economy" cars and six standard (but larger and heavier) family sedans. The crashes, shown and explained in detail, graphically point up the exposure to risk of serious injury and death of the occupants of these cars face in real-world crashes. In each test, the cars were traveling at speeds between 40 and 50 miles per hour. Each crash has been recorded on film by both real-time and slow motion cameras. Following each test, investigators examined the wreckage and made detailed comparisons of the crash results in terms of the possible harm to the occupants. The film shows that accidents in small cars are far more dangerous than is generally realized. Audience: general. Purchase \$175 from Harvest Films, Dept. SN, 309 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

TEACHING WITH TOKENS. 16mm, color, sound, 22 min. Begins with a discussion by the noted psychologist B. F. Skinner of the application of this theory in the education and treatment of retardates, criminals and the mentally ill. He explains the use of "tokens" in a program of reinforcement therapy. The film then shifts to the Adolt Meyer Center and Illinois mental health facility, where a token economy is practiced. The program director, Dr. Bernard Wagner, explains the token economy and points out actual reinforcement, scheduling, punishment, and extinction. Audience: high school, college, professional, general. Purchase \$250 or rental \$25 from CRM Productions, Dept. SN, 9263 W. Third St., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90210.

Listing is for readers' information of new 16mm and 8mm films on science, engineering, medicine and agriculture for professional, student and general audiences. For further information on purchase, rental or free loan, write to distributor.