



books and by making the focus even more specific to women.

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Virus X: Tracking the New Killer Plagues — Out of the Present and Into the Future

Frank Ryan. 430 pp. Illust. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1997. \$33.95. ISBN 0-316-76383-7

Overall rating:	Excellent
Strengths:	Very well written in generally clear language; accessible to laymen and health professionals alike; first-hand experiences and anecdotes bring a more human dimension to everyday headlines
Weaknesses:	Some overlap with other books on the subject; explanation of aggressive symbiosis may be too technical for some readers
Audience:	Anyone interested in emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases

“Plagues frighten people.” With those telling words, Dr. Frank Ryan draws even the most uninvolved reader into the murky world of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. For anyone without a background in the field, this excellent book reads like a “whodunit” mystery novel. Ryan painstakingly provides first-hand experiences of scientists and researchers who have laboured to predict, track and contain both the coming plagues and the devastating diseases of old, and he tells the stories of ordinary people who fell victim to killer infections. Even the most experienced virus hunter would find something in this book to ponder: Ryan puts forth provocative questions for which there may be no comfortable answers.

The book may shake some out of

their complacency because its thesis rests upon the premise that ongoing chaotic ecological and biological changes could lead to exotic or previously unknown diseases popping up in the most unexpected places. Dramatic increases in the ease, speed and amount of international travel, coupled with ever-growing mass displacement of large populations due to famine, war and pestilence, have made diseases previously only found in the deepest, most uninhabited regions of the world as close as the nearest airport. Something similar could be said of the global movement of food and food products. This mobility is unmatched in the animal world and, whether we like to admit it or not, humans can be very efficient and effective spreaders of disease.

Ryan quotes the US Surgeon General's 1967 assertion that infectious diseases had been conquered. Unfortunately, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of their demise were greatly exaggerated, and today we face global epidemics of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, malaria and cholera, to name but a few. Ryan believes we may only have experienced the tip of the iceberg and that there may lurk, somewhere in the world, a Virus X — incurable, as catastrophically lethal as Ebola or HIV/AIDS and spread as easily as the common cold — representing the ultimate manifestation of the “aggressive symbiont” arising from Darwinian evolution as opposed to the accident theory of viral attack. To support his argument, Ryan quotes Dr. Joshua Lederberg's seemingly unequivocal yet disturbingly accurate-sounding contention that the survival of humanity is not preordained by evolution.

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Au pays de la bioéthique : L'éthique biomédicale aux États-Unis

Hubert Doucet. Série *Le champ éthique*, n° 29. 217 p. Labor et Fides, Genève; Fides, St-Laurent (Qué.). 1996. Prix non mentionné. ISBN 2-8309-0819-8

Évaluation générale :	Bon
Points forts :	Description détaillée des écrits pertinents
Faiblesses :	Quelques oublis; très peu d'évaluation du sujet
Clientèle :	Médecins francophones et autres personnes qui s'intéressent à la bioéthique

À toutes fins pratiques, la bioéthique moderne est une création américaine. Dans cet ouvrage, Hubert Doucet, professeur de théologie morale et de bioéthique à l'Université Saint-Paul d'Ottawa, présente aux lecteurs francophones un aperçu historique et une interprétation de la bioéthique aux États-Unis.

Après un premier chapitre relativement bref qui porte sur l'apparition de la bioéthique aux États-Unis, l'auteur décrit 3 étapes de l'évolution de ce domaine d'activité. La première, qui s'étend de la fin des années 1960 au milieu des années 1970, porte avant tout sur le besoin d'orientation éthique dans 2 domaines connexes d'activité scientifique et médicale : l'expérimentation sur les sujets humains et de nouvelles thérapies cliniques comme les greffes d'organe. La deuxième période s'étend des années 1970 à la fin des années 1980. Au cours de cette période, l'activité dans le domaine bioéthique a explosé : importantes décisions des tribunaux (p. ex., Karen Ann Quinlan), mise sur pied de commissions gouvernementales, multiplication des comités d'éthique dans les hôpitaux et apparition d'une masse énorme et croissante d'écrits spécialisés qui tendaient tous à traiter principalement de l'au-