

PostScript

BOOK REVIEWS

A history of epidemiologic methods and concepts

Edited by A. Morabia. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2004, pp 405. ISBN 3-7643-6818-7

The editor of this book offers an original and thought provoking approach to the historical configuration process of what is known today as epidemiology. Although a greater effort at contextualisation would have been welcomed, framing the evolution of the epidemiological concepts and methods against that of public health itself, the various contributions compiled in this monographic work achieve the objectives set out by the editor in the introduction. This text is clearly intended for teaching purposes and, by way of an

antidote to dogmatism, seeks to offer the keys that will reinforce in the reader's mind the temporary nature of all scientific, and, of course, epidemiological knowledge.

In the first part (Epidemiology: an epistemological perspective), the editor analyses the main elements that throughout the contemporary period (chiefly the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries), shaped epidemiological doctrine. Based around the contribution of epidemiological science to the study of the determining factors that condition the state of public health, Alfredo Morabia's work explains the main aspects of its methodology and concludes with a proposal of periodisation by illustrating the main stages in its process of institutionalisation.

The second part of the book (Collection of papers on the history of epidemiological methods and concepts), includes many of the papers presented at the workshop on *Mensuring our Scourges*, held in Annecy (France) in July 1996. This is a compendium of essays, in which different authors offer their analyses of studies that have become classics in the field of epidemiology (from John Snow or William Farr to Karl Pearson), or reflect on some of the most important aspects of the epidemiological method (from problems of causality to issues related to confounding or bias). The inclusion of these essays is a fitting complement to the introductory outline in the first part.

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