

of use of pharmaceutical innovations by consumers has perhaps the greatest impact on future innovations and public policy. Hopefully, future editions of the text will address this important aspect.

Overall, this text would be of greatest value to those in the international community seeking to gain a better understanding of the US pharmaceutical market and of how other global markets influence the US market. Physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical researchers will find the book of limited value, because it presents information that would have been acquired during one's professional education. Accordingly, this book would be useful to undergraduate health education and preprofessional programs.

Finally, the book will be of value to policy makers and to congressional staffers for gaining a deeper understanding of the existing marketplace. For the book to remain relevant, however, longer-term revisions reflecting the dynamics of the global marketplace will need to be incorporated into future editions.

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Financial Disclosures: None reported.

OUR PRECARIOUS HABITAT

By Melvin A. Benarde.
4th ed, 452 pp, \$42.50.
Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2007.
ISBN-13 978-0-4717-4065-0.

PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT HAS DRAMATICALLY changed in recent years. Natural disasters are increasingly viewed through the lens of climate change. Former Vice President Al Gore shared the Nobel Peace Prize with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Even the fashion industry maintains that "green is the new black," and marketing strategies this holiday season reflect consumers' growing environmental conscience. After reading *Our Precarious Habitat*, one gets the impression that, to the extent that these trends broaden the influence of environmentalists, Melvin Benarde is worried.

This book sets out to examine the relationship between human health and the environment. The topics covered comprise an eclectic set, one that readers are unlikely to find combined in any other volume, and Benarde's arguments are provocative. Among his main conclusions are the following: persons in the United States are remarkably healthy, so it is puzzling why they are not "rejoicing, shouting from rooftops, and dancing in the streets." Persons who purchase dietary supplements and engage in alternative medical practices are wasting their money, and possibly doing

themselves harm. If resistance to food irradiation and genetically modified foods were abandoned, immense public health benefits could be realized. While science supports the notion that climate change is an impending problem, the fear of nuclear power and radiation is perhaps based on ignorance and irrationality. To address climate change, nuclear power should be ramped up, because the potential contribution from alternative and renewable sources of energy remains uncertain.

An underlying theme throughout the book is that environmentalists are to blame for many of the world's problems. As stated in the introduction,

For too long, great numbers of people have continued to believe the Cassandran environmentalists, whose monotonous forecasts of doom have not only never materialized, but have been impugned by undeniable evidence. . . . And their handmaidens, the media, promoted their fear mongering.

The result, according to Benarde, is that environmentalists have focused on "Issues that do not warrant our worrying, but for which our country has paid a huge price, financially and emotionally, for the poor decision making fostered by fright-filled voices." *Our Precarious Habitat* is thus Benarde's attempt to set the record straight, for he believes "in the good sense of the people once their minds are unshackled from the hold of environmentalists."

The confrontational tone of the book is troubling because it is completely unnecessary. Given that Benarde's aim is to replace emotionally-based decision making with evidence-based decisions, readers may wonder why when discussing genetically modified crops he feels compelled to write that "Obviously environmentalists cannot stoop low enough. Anything goes to forward their agenda," or when considering nuclear power, he argues that "Environmentalists have acquired power far beyond their numbers—holding the country in thrall to their convoluted purposes: Nuclear power plants, no! Fossil fuels, yes." Readers will detect immediately that Benarde is angry, but he should have left this material in his other book, *You've Been Had! How the Media and Environmentalists Turned America Into a Nation of Hypochondriacs* (Rutgers University Press, 2002). The pieces of this argument that made their way into *Our Precarious Habitat* are not persuasive and only serve to undermine the cool-headed approach that the book seeks to promote.

Looking beyond style, the book has a few substantive merits. It is encouraging to read the overview about how healthy US individuals are, even if they are not shouting from rooftops because they want to be ever more healthier. The caution about dietary supplements is well done, and the chapter on climate change provides a nice introduction. Curiously, the book is a good reference if you want to learn about the basic workings of nuclear reactors. But generally the topics are somewhat random and the discussion wandering. The last chapter, for example, discusses relative risk ratios for identifying causality in epidemiologic studies alongside the

author's perspective on the debate between evolution and intelligent design.

A further shortcoming of the book is how little attention Benarde pays to existing and potential public policy as it relates to the topics covered. When considering how carbon dioxide emissions might be curtailed to address climate change, the only idea he mentions is the need for greater energy efficiency, as advocated by Amory Lovins (misspelled "Lovens" throughout the text). This recommendation is clearly important, but readers are entitled to expect a few words about the vast array of research pertaining to other ideas and policy recommendations. What is more, Benarde discusses Iceland alone when considering what the energy future might bring. To be sure, Iceland's progress in terms of energy self-sufficiency is interesting, but what about the global challenges brought about by the United States, India, and China? One topical area in which the discussion about policy is more thorough and instructive pertains to regulations that govern the labeling (and mislabeling) of dietary supplements.

Benarde concludes the book with a call for more reasoned discourse about current environmental and health challenges. Specifically, he advances the idea of creating grassroots discussion groups so that academics, researchers, and the general public can discuss scientific ideas and developments that are changing their lives. This is a great idea that most everyone would support, and the particular recommendations for getting such groups off the ground are welcomed. But my recommendation is that participants may want to think twice before putting *Our Precarious Habitat* on their reading list.

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Financial Disclosures: None reported.

POISON, DETECTION, AND THE VICTORIAN IMAGINATION

By Ian Burney.
224 pp, \$59.95.
Manchester, England: Manchester University Press; 2006.
ISBN-13 978-0719073762.

IN THE VICTORIAN IMAGINATION, MURDER BY STEALTH through the administration of lethal poisons was associated with the dark intrigues of the Borgias. However, the famous social commentators and historians of mid 19th-century England, Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Babington Macaulay, suggested that the 16th-century Italian way of homicide had become an English epidemic that marked the decline of British civilization. Ian Burney's gripping volume analyses why homicide by poisoning assumed a significant role in Victorian England's popular and learned cul-

tures and investigates the attempts by scientific, medical, and legal reformers to apply new systematic methods of detection and proof to reduce the crime wave. In the process, Burney manages to transform a subject that promises to be limitlessly dull, ie, the history of toxicology, into a fascinating story that offers highly original insight into Victorian society's cultural doubt about its own stability.

Carlyle and Macaulay point out that until the early 19th century, John Bull's way of English murder predominantly had been bloody violence, such as throat slitting and chest stabbing. A perceived exponential increase in poisoning trials in the 1840s appeared to contemporaries to represent a new, secretive, insidious character—and a changing demographic—of villainy, leading the way to Albion's fatal tree. As other historians have pointed out, Victorian poisoners were represented in popular literature and journalism largely as wives and mothers who killed husbands and children for insurance gain and social ambition. The founder of the English public health system, Edwin Chadwick, reinforced this view, believing that burial clubs—informal life insurance groups set up in local taverns—were providing incentive for family massacres.

Burney carefully separates perceptions from empirical record in his analysis of the delicate balance between science and imagination that the poisoner's art occupied in the Victorian frame of mind. The number of mid-century newspaper pages devoted to poisoning trials greatly outstripped the actual increase in the number of cases being judged. Burney points out, however, that the true significance of the poisoning trials was that in each one the courtroom became a battleground in which scientific and legal arguments about proof of guilt or innocence were in the dock.

This is where Burney's account of toxicology's goal of "disciplining" poison takes on the character of a detective novel. Poisons administered in large doses were readily identified in postmortem examination, but slow poisoning using tiny amounts of lethal agents such as arsenic given over a longer period required methodologically sophisticated forensic chemistry, robust theoretical reasoning, and, not least, compelling courtroom rhetoric to persuade juries that proof had been established. The aim of toxicology was to replace observational clinical and postmortem effects with chemical analysis of death's causal agency. As much as the Victorian masters of the discipline, Edinburgh's Robert Christison and Guys Hospital's Alfred Swaine Taylor, attempted to realize this rigorous ambition, it proved impossible without continued reliance on additional evidence, such as witness accounts.

Toxicology's struggle for legitimacy in the courtroom was exemplified in one of the most famous poisoning trials of the time. William Palmer, born in 1824, was a Staffordshire physician with a substantial inherited fortune that he exhausted at the race track. As Palmer's gambling debts and the expenses from his racing stables increased, his family members died off from a variety of causes, making hefty life