

January 1996

Infesting Ourselves: How Environmental and Social Disruptions Trigger Disease

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Recommended Citation

Infesting Ourselves: How Environmental and Social Disruptions Trigger Disease, 25 Denv. J. Int'l L. & Pol'y 208 (1996).

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Infesting Ourselves: How Environmental and Social Disruptions Trigger Disease

The candid and balanced nature of the essays allow for a thorough discussion of the various issues related to religious human rights. Each religion is given proportional space and the authors do not use the pages as a forum for public perception, but instead deal with the objective nature of their topics. One essay of particular interest was that of the draft model on freedom of religion. The model, by Dinah Shelton and Alexandre Kiss, ambitiously proposes the religious human rights the world community should codify. The detailed model includes the following elements: freedom of religion and belief (including those of atheists); protection against compulsion of belief; manifestations of religion or belief (including the right to criticize another's belief system); a secular state; equal rights and no discrimination due to religion; religious organizations given non-profit organization treatment; and civil action enforcement against violations of the code.

The two volume collection spares nothing in making itself an exhaustive and impressive study of the growing area of religious human rights. Theory and application were applied to a societal timeline in a most effective manner.

Mike Mauseth

ANNE E. PLATT, *INFECTING OURSELVES: HOW ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DISRUPTIONS TRIGGER DISEASE*, Worldwatch Paper 129, Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C. (1996); (\$5.00); ISBN 1-878071-31-9; 62 pp. (pbk).

In *Infecting Ourselves*, Anne Platt details the increasing spread of communicative diseases, its sources, and potential solutions. Focusing on the renewed emergence of infectious diseases, Platt addresses society's inadequacy in dealing with their cause—microbes. As well as including several, very detailed charts, Platt dedicates the first five chapters to the causes and aggravating factors of infectious disease. She concludes by proposing several ways to alleviate the effect of these diseases.

In the first two chapters of the book, Platt briefly summarizes the historical background to, and widespread effects of communicative diseases and asserts that prevention is the key to solving this problem. The author suggests that the decline in the level of public health services, such as cutbacks in education, water supply, hygiene, and preventative medicine contributes to the increasing dilemma of the "infectious killers." She further notes that although communicative diseases take their greatest toll in developing countries, they are increasingly occurring in industrialized countries, such as the United States. Platt argues that much of this increase can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the microbes' life cycles, and their ecology. Accordingly, all

countries, regardless of their level of economic development, are vulnerable to the devastating effects of infectious diseases', and thus, the burden of addressing this matter is shared.

In chapter three, Platt turns her attention to the impact of social conditions on infectious diseases. Citing overcrowded populations, Platt explains the microbes' need for a population large enough to support its chain of infection—passing from the host to those with whom the host comes in contact. Further, due to the increased travel between countries, no single population is immune from infection. Exemplifying this effect, the author traces the brief history of the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the rapidity with which it has swept across the world. Platt acknowledges the measures taken by various countries and resolves that education, regarding the manner in which these diseases are spread, must continue.

Chapter four addresses the affect of environmental disturbances on infectious diseases. Platt suggests that developmental measures, including deforestation, the construction of dams, and changes in the composition of crops indigenous to an area, have altered the ecosystems which previously kept the effect of microbes in check. As a result of changing the natural balance in various areas, certain species have abounded, while their predators have declined. Platt adds that environmental disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, often exacerbate these conditions, providing prime environments for infectious diseases to flourish. The author concludes that in addition to keeping their environmental habitats intact, communities should provide increased health education, and should require city planners to utilize such information in their projects.

Platt next discusses disease caused by unsafe water, a factor currently responsible for eighty percent of all disease in the developing world. Citing unsafe drinking water and lack of sanitation, the author describes various processes by which a person may become infected. Platt also details specific instances of neglect in areas such as the former Soviet Union, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the United States. She further relates the high economic costs associated with improving unsafe water conditions, and cites this as a factor in the continued existence of such conditions. Platt determines that increased attention must be given to waterborne diseases.

Adding to the above problems is the lack of medicine available to cure the diseases, which Platt addresses in her sixth chapter. The author asserts that numerous strains of diseases become immune to antibiotics as a result of their improper use. Accordingly, new medicines must be developed and the cost of cure increases. To solve these problems, Platt recommends the sparing use of antibiotics, as well as preventative measures, such as widespread immunizations. She also sees hope in the testing for new antibiotics and vaccines.

In the last chapter, Platt proposes solutions to the infectious disease situation. First, she suggests increasing the adequacy of health care systems; and second, she recommends heightened awareness of the causes of underlying communicative diseases. The combined effect of these suggestions will be the prevention of the further spread of disease.

In its entirety, this work provides a mechanism by which the novice may determine and understand the underlying causes of infectious diseases. Although often explicit, *Infecting Ourselves* communicates the necessity for public attention to this matter. Platt makes it clear that the devastating effect of communicative diseases cannot be ignored.

Sarah Ellen Scofield

STEPHEN DYCUS, *NATIONAL DEFENSE AND THE ENVIRONMENT*; University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire (1996); (\$19.95); ISBN 0-87451-735-4; 286 pp. (pbk.).

Stephen Dycus' *National Defense and the Environment* provides a wide ranging overview of the relationship between U.S. environmental laws and their application by the military establishment. The book is written in a style which is easily understood by the average reader, thus, making it a useful guide for students, teachers, attorneys, and the general public alike. The author uses a minimum of confusing acronyms and explains legal citations. Case studies throughout the text provide valuable examples of the practical application of environmental laws in relation to national defense concerns. The book is organized into nine chapters containing general overviews of relevant topics and a conclusion summarizing the potential for harmonizing national defense concerns with protection of the environment. Three appendices provide a comprehensive listing of environmental cases involving national defense activities, government agencies, and private organizations. In addition, the extensive and thorough footnotes provide a valuable source of information for those wishing to delve further into the subject matter.

The end of the Cold War turned attention to the impact of the defense establishment on the environment at home and abroad. Dycus focuses on the need to reconcile national security interests with the need for environmental protection. He points out that official military policy requires that the defense establishment protect the environment as much as possible. This task is made more important considering the Pentagon controls over 25 million acres in the U.S., three quarters of which are important fish and wildlife habitat. The Department of Energy controls another 2.4 million acres.