

Book Review: Microcompetition with Foreign DNA and the Origin of Chronic Disease

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Citation

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Abstract

This is a difficult book. But it is also a fascinating work. The hypothesis of the book is a simple one, one that is expressed in the title: microcompetition with foreign DNA (a virus) leads to chronic diseases. To take an example from the chapter on atherosclerosis, microcompetition between a virus (in this case cytomegalovirus) and a transcription factor GABP leads to decreased binding of the latter to a DNA sequence, which in turn increases the degree of plaque formation. This is achieved through a series of steps that take effort to absorb. This is what makes the book difficult. The author painstakingly makes his case by setting up the building blocks for his argument. He does so by marshalling an impressive list of references that prove his point. He then takes those points a step further by funneling them into his hypothesis. This is done with the help of flow diagrams and mathematics—this too could make the job of reading this book difficult for some. I cannot claim that I understood every sentence in this book, but that, with the employment of more than the usual number of neurons (too many at times), I was able to comprehend many of the author's points. That this book is hard to read is definitely a criticism. But one thing is for certain that this book does not deserve to be left unread because it is difficult. Instead, this is work that demands a fair reading, or multiple fair readings, and beyond that, it needs to be evaluated, and 'answered,' as I explain below.

The author deserves to be congratulated for bringing together the hard work of such a diverse group of investigators. It becomes immediately obvious that the author has had to expend a considerable quantity of hard work himself to achieve this feat. Beyond this, comes clear evidence of the activity of what Agatha Christie's famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot would have called 'the little gray cells'. The author leaves little to chance or the faith of a gullible reader. Each link in his hypothesis is presented with

the research that supports it. His proof rests on a number of unrelated studies performed on a wide range of experimental models. [As the research crosses disciplines and specialties, I am reminded somewhat of the work of Marvin Harris, the famous anthropologist, who also crossed the boundaries of differing specialties and academic fiefdoms to arrive at his groundbreaking hypothesis of Cultural Materialism (see for example, his *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches*. But don't get me wrong: the late Marvin Harris wrote for the interested layman and his books are very easy reads)]. Beyond the proofs, he provides predictions from his hypothesis and how they may be tested. An impressive array of diseases meets with the Polansky treatment, including atherosclerosis, alopecia, diabetes, and graft versus host disease. The end result of this labor is that whether you agree or disagree with Dr. Polansky, you cannot deny that he makes a compelling case.

What makes the book especially impressive is the wide range of diseases that fall into Dr. Polansky's microcompetition canvas. Would you believe it if someone were to put together atherosclerosis, baldness, obesity, arthritis, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis and graft versus host disease (to name a few) as being due to a common mechanism? And would you further believe that somebody who did so had done so with a considerable degree of credibility and wasn't just another crackpot with a crazy idea? Dr. Polansky, to my mind, has done both. So the book clearly deserves to be read. I feel that specialists in the different fields addressed in this book should find plenty to keep them busy. And finally, the book deserves an answer, and not just a pat one such as 'this is too simplistic and absurd.' If that is the answer that one wishes to give, then perhaps whoever gives it can give it with the kind of thought and effort that Dr. Polansky has put into his arguments. The best answer would be one where the book

inspires further valuable research, generating newer insights into the causation of diseases.

References

Author Information

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