

## BOOK REVIEWS

Daniel Leviton, ed.: *Horrendous Death: Health and Well Being*. Hemisphere Publishing, New York, 1991; *Horrendous Death and Health: Toward Action*. Hemisphere Publishing, New York, 1991.

Within the field of the sociology of death, the "radical wing" is represented by authors whose work has been collected in these two anthologies. These authors have penetrated deeply into the root causes and basis issues of the problem of "horrendous death." They also present analyses useful in responding to the causes of such death. The general trend within sociology and psychology is to study individual and group coping strategies with respect to the death of others and their own mortality. The bulk of the contemporary "thanatology," the discourse about death, studies death on a microcosmic level (the dying person, the bereaved, the suicidal, etc.). The authors of the *Horrendous Death* anthologies focus on types of death as they relate to the macrocosmic social tendencies.

*Horrendous Death: Health and Well Being* focuses on defining horrendous death. Examples include chemical and biological disasters, mass poisoning and pollution of water and food, destruction of the biosphere, malnutrition and undernutrition, and conventional and nuclear wars. This work at defining terms is intended to contribute to public education about health and death issues and to suggest the imminent danger we face. All of the forms of horrendous death listed are *related to capitalism*. Horrendous deaths are "man-made," often unexpected or unintended, and usually involve the premature death of large numbers of people. These forms of death are often torturous, have little or no value within social or political legitimation processes, and are usually denied by individuals as potential causes of death for themselves or loved ones.

Some chapters appear to represent "emergency handbooks." Others are the result of academic research projects, or they provide typologies, historical background, or conceptual frameworks for examining horrendous death. Examples include analyses of how much of a country's gross national product is dedicated to military spending;

percentages of children in industrialized countries born with congenital birth defects traceable to polluted environments; and studies of the psychological consequences of surviving threats of horrendous death or ongoing fear of impending death.

The authors collectively agree that these causes of death can be prevented, but not solely by individual actions. They clearly suggest that only an international and collective effort can forestall such deaths. The threat and actuality of horrendous death is a global health problem. As such, a global community must be formed to mobilize global resources to defeat the causes of horrendous death.

The second volume, *Horrendous Death: Toward Action*, stresses collective action through pressure groups and grassroots mobilizations aimed at public institutions. Although the authors do not push their insights in deeply radical directions, the possibility for radical movements grounded in a universal human right to good health would seem to be excellent. One hoped-for consequence of this volume is to stimulate social debate and strategizing through the effort to define a movement still in its embryonic stage. Movements which are self-consciously organized around the principles suggested in these anthologies will necessarily relate international causes and tendencies to local experiences of death. In fact, there is an apparent spread of awareness within many strata in capitalist countries as to the necessity of restructuring the political economy in ways that will counteract the causes of, and tendencies toward, horrendous death.

The editor of the two volumes, Daniel Leviton, suggests three main categories into which "horrendous death" may be classified: War, genocide, and other forms of intentional mass death; unintended ecological effects of capitalist production, pollution, and depletion or ecological collapse and decline; and unintended social effects of the capitalist mode of production, declining public health, health care, and social infrastructure. The text calls the cause of death, "deathogenic factors," and the demands of social movements organized in direct opposition to horrendous deaths, "lifegenic factors." The examples given of lifegenic factors, however, tend toward Euro- and U.S.-centrism and are over-intellectualized (meaningful education and employment, love and friendship, financial security, access to quality health care etc.). Bereft of a radical class analysis, the two volumes fail to recognize how lifegenic factors represent class privilege — although capitalism soon may not even be able to protect even the wealthy from these threats. The typology noted above represents an attempt to theoretically access the causes of our own death. Special attention is given to fear and denial of death, as well as to hypothesizing possible

individual responses and social remedies. Despite descriptive materials and prescriptions for action, the anthologies do not analyze conditions of popular empowerment and disempowerment. One author suggests that the greatest internal restraint to freedom occurs when we ignore the most basic fact of human experience, that we will all die. While this represents an excellent starting point, a materialist and ideological analysis of this "restraint on freedom" is still needed. The second volume suggests that one organizational goal for social and environmental change may be the motivation to "insure our future health and the health of the future" in opposition to impending horrendous death. Death As a Stimulus to Improve the Quality of Global Health Project is an international union of groups ranging from the Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development to the Ground Zero Pairing Project. It is associated with a wide variety of other groups, including the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation and Physicians for Social Responsibility. These organizations are not radical or revolutionary. They promote political, social, and economic interventions by "ethically-aware nation-states." They do not suggest any basic transformation of the capitalist mode of production, but put forth some of the most progressive positions within the fields of sociology and psychology of death.

These anthologies represent a move in the right direction. The work that remains to be done is to use the insights generated by these authors to transform their immanent and radical implications into real actions. Many of the authors, perhaps unconsciously, resonate with Marx's last thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways the point, however, is to change it." — **Laura Corradi**

Peter Hay and Robyn Eckersley, eds.: *Ecopolitical Theory: Essays from Australia*. Hobart: Board of Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, 1992.

In the last essay of *Ecopolitical Theory*, Peter Hay suggests that the green movement, through the forge of daily battle, has become tactically skilled; that through intellectual work, it has forged a set of first principles and end-state visions; but that it has been and continues to be *strategically* inept. Little progress has been made in linking tactics to end-states. These lacunae are the ultimate concern of this anthology. The first three essays, a survey of basic philosophical directions within the environmental movement, a contrast between deep ecology and