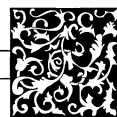


for epigenetic modifications, other than DNA methylation, to contribute to the imprinting phenomenon. Haig and Trivers's intellectually rigorous approach to the evolution of imprinting (or, perhaps more properly, examination of the selective forces that might maintain imprinting) is a refreshing departure from the generally naïve and undisciplined ramblings on the subject that are found floating aimlessly and unattractively, like flies in the soup, in almost all previous reviews of the subject (my own included).

There is a heavy emphasis placed on the significance and biochemical characteristics of a few genes, particularly *Igf2/IGF2*, *Igf2r*, and *H19* (16 of the papers discuss one or more of these genes in some detail). This emphasis probably reflects the status of these genes as the first endogenous genes to be identified as imprinted, but the volume might have provided less repetitive reading by venturing farther afield. In this respect, the two-chapter section on Prader-Willi syndrome comes as a welcome addition.

The initiated will feel that, like most symposium volumes, the collection suffers from the fact that most contributors have included very few data that have not been published elsewhere. The reader who wishes a good introduction to the subject is unlikely to feel that the volume is compromised by this. In fact, a major strength of this collection, for the student and the casually interested reader, is in the way the majority of contributors have summarized the results of many experiments in a few sentences. Of course, this forest-rather-than-trees approach is a double-edged sword (saw?) because in a few cases different contributors draw opposite conclusions from precisely the same set of experiments. The neophyte may experience the same disheartening sense of betrayal that I once had upon discovering that a statement given as "fact" by a trusted mentor proved, ultimately, to be false ("Not everything I know is true," he responded).

To my mind, the subtitle of the collection is misleading. None of the contributors would, if pressed, admit the existence of a convincing case for the "cause" of genomic imprinting. That we do not know what "causes" genome imprinting (or by what mechanism it is established) is, of course, part of the attraction of the subject. Such intransigence in the face of the best efforts of a large number of talented and intelligent people is the reason such a collection of reviews as this is still of interest. The conversational tone of the contributions further makes for entertaining reading. Those who have heard the contributors speak will have little trouble imagining Davor Solter, who must bear



Vignettes: Ponderables

There's no doubt that humans commonly hallucinate. There's considerable doubt about whether extraterrestrials exist, frequent our planet, or abduct and molest us. We might argue about details, but the one category of explanation is surely much better supported than the other. The main reservation you might then have is: Why do so many people today report this particular set of hallucinations? Why somber little beings, and flying saucers, and sexual experimentation?

—Carl Sagan, in *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (Random House)

We know we will spend money or pass laws in the face of some risks but not others. Even granting that we select those risks influenced by cultural biases, even granting that we will judge the success of our policies influenced by cultural biases, what do we say to the man who whistles to keep elephants away in the heart of Manhattan? Surely he is expending a great deal of unnecessary energy. Is global warming simply the perfect foil for the apocalyptic needs of sectarian organizations? Or is it the sort of remote threat that hierarchical and individualist organizations tend to be blind to?

—Charles T. Rubin, in *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism* (Free Press)

primary responsibility for unearthing this biological Pandora's Box in the first place, voicing, in his mellifluous baritone and slightly accented English, a pertinent sub-heading of his and Gilligan's first chapter: "Imprinting: who needs it?"

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