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William Leiss & Christina Chociolko, *Risk and Responsibility* (McGill-Queens University Press 1994). ISBN 0-7735-1177-6 (cloth) 0-7735-H1194-6.(paper). Abbreviations, acknowledgements, bibliography, figures, notes, preface, tables. [405 pp. Paper \$55.00; cloth \$22.95. 3430 McTavish St., Montreal, Quebec, H3A 1X9 Canada.]

Leiss and Chociolko claim that if there is one lesson in their book, it is that "All of us in modern society have a direct and vital interest in the proper allocation of responsibility for risky activity."¹

In supporting such a determination the authors highlight not only risks brought about by, e.g., commercial searches for better products, but also by day-to-day risks undertaken by the general population — ones that arise, for example, in daily household chores, sports, recreation and driving automobiles.

That apportioning responsibility for risk is highly controversial is the cornerstone of this book. By examining a few health and environmental risks, e.g., electromagnetic fields, Alar (a growth regulator for food crops) and Antisapstain (a pesticide used in softwood lumber products), the authors set up a dichotomy with institutions and experts on one hand and the media and general public on the other. Such a split, they say, reflects that all parties "have a direct interest in under-assessing and under-estimating risks so as to maximize net benefits for themselves."² This self interest is said to lead to inevitable disputes.

Much of the book is to be commended, e.g., the authors' coherent overview of risk³ and risk assessment for a reader previously unacquainted with such concepts as presented here. They offer a cool, collected objective analysis of risk-based disputes that can be desirable and helpful in a field often driven by subjective aims.

Yet, *Risk and Responsibility* seems to trivialize or miss issues that call for deeper analysis. At the outset, its authors state that society cannot "maintain our attained level of material well-being without engaging in [risky] activity."⁵ They go on to say that "failure to

¹ At 5.

² At 52.

³ "The exposure to the chance of loss... usually induced by some social actor to realize an incremental net benefit," at 6.

⁴ At 5.

properly apportion responsibility for inevitable losses, and to compensate adequately those who suffer unfairly..., will result in gradually rising... support for risk-avoidance...."⁵ However, they seem not to appreciate that some in society already regard the initial statement as controversial and the outcome as not necessarily desirable. In the face of disparities between losses and benefits as reflected by economic, social and political realities, people appear unwilling to settle for loss compensation when gains appear to go elsewhere. Notwithstanding its useful contributions, this book's matter-of-fact approach to resolving conflicts seems to miss the heart of much risk-based controversy.

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⁵ *Id.*

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