

However, placebo effect is demonstrated in a multitude of research studies, irrespective of the conditions investigated. And the magnitude of the effect seems to be similar across many studies (around a 25% improvement in hot-flush symptoms), despite differences in methodologies and research populations.

Furthermore, both traditional cultures and Western women sometimes use herbal remedies for hot flushes. When these remedies are tested in modern clinical trials, they have not reliably been shown to be more effective than placebos.

Modern hormone replacement therapy (HRT) reduces hot flushes by around 80%. Mattern argues that medical advice for menopause is dictated by the availability of profitable treatments. However, recommendations change as new information and understanding arise. For instance, the US Women's Health Initiative trial was terminated early in 2002 owing to fears of increased risk of some cancers, including breast cancer. After this, there was a move away from long-term HRT to prevent the negative effects on the bone and heart that can arise from loss of oestrogen. Instead, it is mostly prescribed for menopausal symptoms (mainly hot flushes), and for only five years (see also J. Marjoribanks *et al.* *Cochrane Database Syst. Rev.* <http://doi.org/10.1002/14695062.1317>).

*The Slow Moon Rises* adds food for thought on the evolutionary role of post-reproductive lifespan. But I feel that its view of menopause as a cultural phenomenon emanating from modern medicine risks diverting limited resources away from further research. It might even fuel complacency that the condition is 'only menopause', rather than highlighting the fact that the majority of women experience disruptive symptoms. That, in turn, could prevent millions of women from accessing treatment and support — depriving them of an immediate benefit, irrespective of any evolutionary-scale advantage. ■

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**Julia Prague** is a British clinical and academic endocrinologist, with an interest in treatments for menopausal hot flushes.

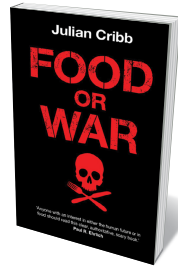
Twitter: @julia\_prague

e-mail: [juliaprague@doctors.org.uk](mailto:juliaprague@doctors.org.uk)

#### CLARIFICATION

The book review 'Radical reform and the Green New Deal' (*Nature* **573**, 340–341; 2019) noted that Naomi Klein "dismisses" market mechanisms for pricing carbon. It should have said that she "critiques" them.

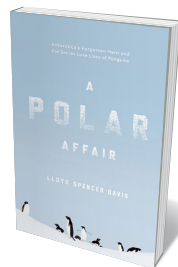
## Books in brief



### Food or War

Julian Cribb CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS (2019)

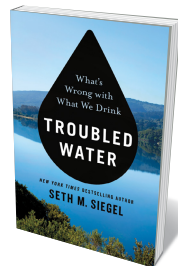
Hammered by environmental stresses and mismanagement, our food system is inequitable and unstable. As science journalist Julian Cribb argues in this incisive analysis, that can lead to conflict — as it did during the 2007–10 drought in Syria, which devastated crops and helped spark the war. Cribb's bold prescription for sustainable global agriculture envisions harnessing urban waste as a feedstock for 'food loops' and incorporating rooftop farms, 'agritecture', ecological farming methods and funding from redirected military budgets. Devastating and inspiring in equal measure.



### A Polar Affair

Lloyd Spencer Davis PEGASUS (2019)

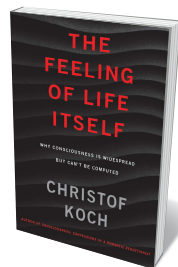
In this intriguing scientific history-cum-memoir, penguin biologist Lloyd Spencer Davis harks back to a pioneering predecessor. George Murray Leveck, a physician on Robert Falcon Scott's ill-fated 1910 expedition to Antarctica, became the first to study penguins scientifically as he overwintered in an ice cave. His manuscript, *The Sexual Habits of the Adélie Penguin* (1915), documented behaviours he saw as "depraved"; it was suppressed for a century. Meanwhile Davis, unwittingly treading in Leveck's footsteps, uncovered many of the same findings. A rip-roaring read on research at the edge.



### Troubled Water

Seth M. Siegel THOMAS DUNNE (2019)

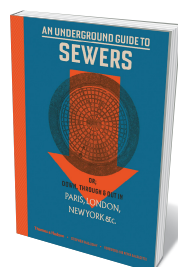
US water-supply crises go far beyond Flint, Michigan (see M. Peplow *Nature* **559**, 180; 2018). So reveals environmental writer Seth Siegel in this engrossing, well-reported survey of cases such as that of Hoosick Falls, New York, where contamination with the industrial chemical perfluorooctanoic acid has been linked to kidney cancer. The culprits, he argues, include Congress, the chemical industry and a lax Environmental Protection Agency. Yet, although these stories are grim, the outcomes could be very different if communities had access to filtration, scientific advice and other easy solutions.



### The Feeling of Life Itself

Christof Koch MIT PRESS (2019)

How is consciousness linked to the fatty, watery organ lodged in our skulls? The mind–body problem has troubled thinkers for millennia. In the past decade, however, experimentation has spotlighted some of the conundrum's darker corners, as Christof Koch (president of the Allen Institute for Brain Science in Seattle, Washington) reveals in this invigorating study. Koch tracks the "neural footprints" of experience; swims off the wilder shores of integrated information theory; and speculates about the "feeling of life itself" in ravens, bees and octopuses — along with related ethical concerns.



### An Underground Guide to Sewers

Stephen Halliday THAMES & HUDSON (2019)

From flush toilets 4,000 years old on the Greek island of Santorini to Eugène Belgrand's elegant Belle Époque sewers under Paris, sanitation has a certain cachet. This splendid illustrated volume by Stephen Halliday swirls through millennia of ingenious waste management. Here are, for instance, London's vast Victorian system designed by Joseph Bazalgette; Tokyo's gargantuan underground discharge channel; and Sedron Technologies' cutting-edge Janicki Omni Processor, which uses steam power and filtration to rapidly convert waste to drinkable water and energy. [Barbara Kiser](#)