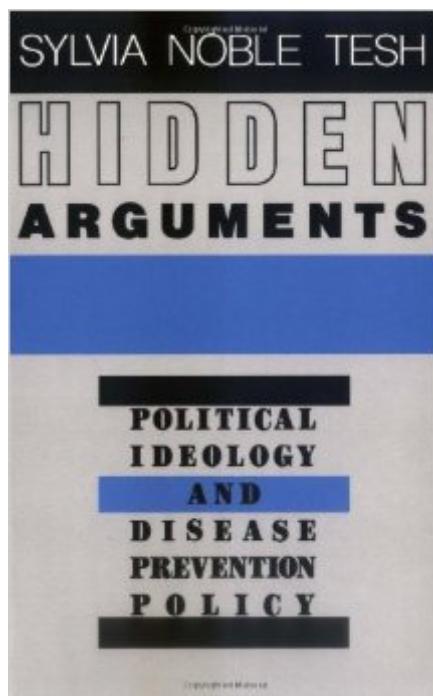


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Hidden Arguments: Political Ideology And Disease Prevention Policy



Synopsis

In this provocative book, Sylvia Tesh shows how "politics masquerades as science" in the debates over the causes and prevention of disease. Tesh argues that ideas about the causes of disease which dominate policy at any given time or place are rarely determined by scientific criteria alone. The more critical factors are beliefs about how much government can control industry, who should take risks when scientists are uncertain, and whether the individual or society has the ultimate responsibility for health. Tesh argues that instead of lamenting the presence of this extra-scientific reasoning, it should be brought out of hiding and welcomed. She illustrates her position by analyzing five different theories of disease causality that have vied for dominance during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and discusses in detail the political implications of each theory. Tesh also devotes specific chapters to the multicausal theory of disease, to health education policy in Cuba, to the 1981 air traffic controller's strike, to the debate over Agent Orange, and to an analysis of science as a belief system. Along the way she makes these principal points: She criticizes as politically conservative the idea that diseases result from a multifactorial web of causes. Placing responsibility for disease prevention on "society" is ideological, she argues. In connection with the air traffic controllers she questions whether it is in a union's best interests to claim that workers' jobs are stressful. She shows why there are no entirely neutral answers to questions about the toxicity of environmental pollutants. In a final chapter, Tesh urges scientists to incorporate egalitarian values into their search for the truth, rather than pretending science can be divorced from that political ideology. Sylvia Noble Tesh, a political scientist, is on the faculty of the University of Michigan School of Public Health.

Book Information

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Although this book is over 20 years old, its scope and relevance will continue as long as humans live in societies. Societies are built on political ideologies, which determine people's understanding of health and disease. When we come to understand this we will be better able to understand and prevent disease. The examples mentioned include tobacco and smoking. For example, Australians (such as me) regard smoking as the cause of much disease. Therefore as a nation we are doing better and better in controlling smoking. However we are vulnerable to pressures to introduce smoke free tobacco, and to the lobbying from tobacco growers because of the focus on smoking - rather than tobacco as the number one cause of death. Examples from Cuba demonstrate how even in a socialist society, individualism has dominated views on causes of disease. Individualism determines how most countries go about protecting people from disease. Individualism will fail to prevent disease when causes are overwhelmingly social. A better understanding of how political ideology guides understandings of disease causation will lead to more effective disease prevention policy. Read this book to improve your understanding!

What an expose on public health history! Excellent! An interesting historical perspective of public health and infectious disease that any public health professional or student should read! An excellent book; no question about that!

The text is pretty good, and it's easy to read, but without having page numbers in the book - it makes it practically useless for academics. The locations become practically impossible to relate to page numbers and to cite. If you are using for a class you are much better off buying the paperback version

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