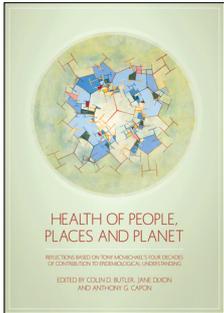


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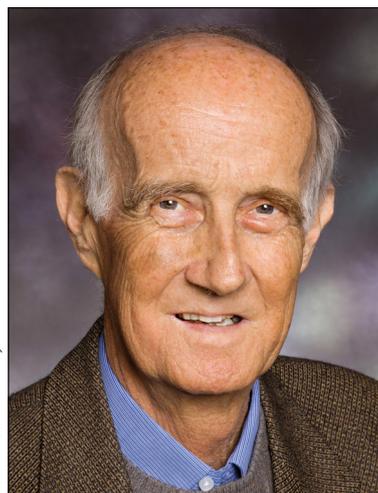
Healthy planet, healthy people



Health of People, Places and Planet: Reflections Based on Tony McMichael's Four Decades of Contribution to Epidemiological Understanding
 Colin D Butler, Jane Dixon, Anthony G Capon, eds.
 Australian National University Press, 2015. AUS \$55.00.
 ISBN 9781925022407.
 Free formats available from <http://press.anu.edu.au/titles/health-of-people-places-and-planet/>

I first met Tony McMichael over the nappy changing table at a parent run child care cooperative in Chapel Hill, NC, USA, in 1972. He was an assistant professor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and he and his wife Judith had a young daughter. Tony was a rising star in epidemiology. I was a postgraduate student from London, also with a new baby, working on my masters thesis in social medicine. I was pleased to find a fellow jogger, although Tony was much more serious about running than I ever was. Fitter, too.

Health of People, Places and Planet is a testament to how far, how high, and how wide Tony's public health career ranged and rose. The book's chapters are based on papers presented at a conference to mark Tony's retirement in 2012 from the Australian National University's National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health and is organised into seven sections, each introduced by a published paper by Tony. These papers summarise his major public health preoccupations and could easily stand alone as a primer on the evolution of epidemiology in the past four decades and as a summary of the major challenges we now face.



Australian National University

Tony McMichael (1942–2014)

The paper that should have had the most influence on epidemiologists is his "Prisoners of the Proximate: Loosening the Constraints on Epidemiology in an Age of Change" from 1999. He argued that epidemiology must look beyond its preoccupations with individual risk factors and devote more attention in multidisciplinary partnerships to the underlying determinants of health. Unfortunately, too few epidemiologists and scientists in related areas are willing to jointly study and confront the

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threats to planetary health.

The book comes alive in the section on "Climate Change and Health". Tony's most enduring contribution to planetary health will be his three books on this topic: *Planetary Overload: Global Environmental Change and the Health of the Human Species* in 1993; *Human Frontiers, Environments and Disease: Past Patterns, Uncertain Futures* from 2001, and his forthcoming *Climate and the Health of Nations: Famines, Fevers and the Fate of Populations*. Many of the contributions to this book examine and expand upon these topics, for example, Martin McKee's chapter on the social and health effects of extractive industries other than coal and oil.

The final part of the book on "Transformations" begins to chart the way for a public health response to threats to planetary health. A key proposal by Tim Lang and Geof Rayner is to move away from traditional public health models and work towards a new model of public health—ecological public health—emphasising

the importance of the "public" to public health and as a way of confronting neoliberalism. However, it seems a bit late to be reshaping public health, given the immediacy of the threats. The new United Nations sustainable development agenda and the 17 associated Sustainable Development Goals, if taken seriously, have the potential to bring many of the concerns expressed in this book to the forefront of high-level political consciousness. However, as pointed out in several chapters, notably by Trevor Hancock, this will not happen without strong, concerted, and connected movements of concerned citizens around the world.

Tony encouraged us to focus attention on the big picture and the social, economic, and environmental changes that are increasingly a threat to the sustainability of planetary health, and thus a threat to all of us. Tony would, I suspect, have been frustrated by the lack of discussion in this book on the practical ways to secure planetary health and disappointed by the voluntary nature of the Paris Agreement reached at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December, 2015.

I last ran with Tony during a lunchtime break from a WHO climate change meeting in Geneva around 2007. I noticed, for the first time, that I was able to keep up with him and talk at the same time. Later, he told me that he was living on only about 10% of his renal function. This attitude was typical of his fortitude and persistence and his willingness to do what many of us find too difficult and would rather avoid. Fortunately, *Health of People, Places and Planet* shows the willingness of many of his colleagues to continue to promote planetary health.

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