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Reviewed by Noelle Plack, Newman University, Birmingham, UK

“In the old world, wine-making is an art; in America, it is an industry,” proclaimed André Simon in 1919. This famous quote opens James Simpson’s admirable book on the structural differences in the wine industry during the first wave of globalization pre-1914. While most books on wine focus on one country or region, Simpson is one of the first to have taken an international approach and the results are impressive. By employing the concept of “commodity chain from growers to consumers,” he is able to uncover the striking variants in the production and marketing of cheap table wines in the old and new worlds that emerged in decades prior to the First World War. In Europe, grape growing and wine making were combined usually done on small family-run vineyards, but marketing was a specialist activity of brokers and merchants. While in California, Australia and Argentina expert growers cultivated the grapes but the production and marketing of the varietal wines were often integrated by large wineries or business trusts. For the most part these differences still exist today; Simpson argues that they were in place by 1914 and were cause by six distinct but interrelated variables: terroir, tradition, technology, nature of market demand, political voice and national political organization. Interwoven into this context is the variance between fine and commodity wine, which were (and are) essentially two discrete industries, as the quality/volume ratio is incompatible.

The majority of the book is set in Europe analyzing how traditional viticulture was transformed by the effects of a devastating vine disease, the emergence of new wine making technologies and how the problems of overproduction, fraud and adulteration were solved. There were many tensions between small independent vine growers, merchants and national governments over how to guarantee the authenticity of a wine from a specific region. In France, the solution of creating the burgeoning *appellation contrôlées* system in 1905 is well-known, but Simpson brings new clarity by focusing on the economic structures of two of the most powerful and politically influential regions pushing for such reform: Bordeaux and Champagne. He also puts this subject in a comparative framework and argues that such a regulatory system did not occur in Spain as the small-producers in the sherry-producing Jerez were routinely ignored in this “elite democracy” in favor of the merchants and bankers, who saw an *appellation* system as diametrically opposed to their interests. The development of growers’ cooperatives is another topic that is given a contrasting analysis. Although they allowed small family-run vineyards the economies of scale of large wineries, they appeared much earlier in France than in Spain or Portugal because of the strength of rural growers and the political imperatives of the French Third Republic.

Simpson charts the remarkable growth of the wine industry in the new world in the final part of the book. Considering virtually no wine was produced in 1870 the takeoff to 3.8 million hL in Argentina, 2 million hL in Chile and 1.8 million hL in California by 1910 is extraordinary. The better climate, new wine making technologies, cheaper
land and large purpose-built wineries allowed winemakers to produce more consistent and homogenous wines year in and year out. A case study of the California Wine Association reveals that this trust of the state’s seven largest wine houses was one of the most successful vertically integrated firms in the business. It controlled the quality of its wines in the U.S. market and sold CWA-branded wines in bottles directly to retailers to guarantee their purity.

While the CWA was unique, their wines were still competing with more established drinks, such as beer and spirits. By contrast, in France, Spain, Portugal and Argentina wine was the alcoholic beverage of choice. This scholarly book draws on a diverse and notable source-base from around the world. It is an important achievement in the historiography as it establishes a new cohesive view of the emergence of the global wine industry. It is, however, a very structural and institutional interpretation; social and cultural historians with interests in drinking traditions, customs, tastes and habits will be frustrated as these issues are often overlooked. There is a chapter on selling wine in the British market after Gladstone’s 1860 lowering of duties to encourage consumption. While Simpson’s multi-layered analysis of why the British failed to increase their consumption at the end of the nineteenth century due mainly to issues surrounding the inconsistencies of wine quality is engaging, it completely eschews the social and cultural traditions of Britain as a beer-drinking nation. Were “British consumers” by which Simpson really means the upper-middle classes ever really large enough to lead a wine drinking revolution in Britain? This minor criticism withstanding, Creating Wine is a welcomed addition as it unravels the complicated story of how and why the global wine industry developed in the way it did and includes a brief conclusion on how these structural differences have endured for most of the twentieth century.

Reviewed by W. J. Rorabaugh, University of Washington, Seattle.

In the mid-1960s the two leading promoters of LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) were Timothy Leary, the highly quotable Harvard psychologist, and Ken Kesey (1935-2001), the best-selling author of One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1962). The pair wanted to use psychedelics to change both individual consciousness and society, but their purposes were different. Taking intellectual high ground, Leary emphasized “scientific” experiments or religious freedom, in contrast with Kesey’s freewheeling celebration of freedom and fun. A libertarian, Kesey tried to flood the market with LSD before officialdom could respond. As early as 1963, two years before Leary, Kesey sensed an emerging revolution in values and morals. Accordingly, he abandoned novel-writing to plan his famous acid-laden bus trip across the country in 1964.

Rick Dodgson covers Kesey’s life only up to the bus trip. Imbued with frontier values, the boy grew up in hardscrabble rural Colorado and Oregon. A champion wrestler, as well as a magician, actor, and playwright at the University of Oregon, Kesey failed to break into Hollywood either as an actor or screenwriter, and only then turned to writing novels. After winning a graduate fellowship to Stanford University in 1958, Kesey wrote an unpublished first novel about Beat life in North Beach in San Francisco.

The breakthrough moment came in 1960, when Kesey participated in psychedelic experiments at the nearby Veterans Administration hospital. Stunned by LSD, Kesey saw the old world, with all of its cultural assumptions, explode before his eyes. He
introduced psychedelics to other Stanford graduate students, writers, and artists who, like Kesey and his wife Faye, lived in the bohemian community on Perry Lane. Kesey then took a job at the VA hospital, which enabled him to research Cuckoo’s Nest, to write the novel late at night, and to supply Perry Lane with stolen psychedelic pills. The idea for the book came while high on peyote, a psychedelic cactus widely used by Native Americans, and Kesey subsequently decided to have Chief Bromden, a shrewd but literally crazy Indian, narrate the tale. The book became a best-seller because it appeared just as large numbers of restless young readers began to challenge traditional culture.

While Dodgson’s cut-off date excludes some of Kesey’s better-known escapades, including the bus trip, the Acid Tests, and Kesey’s support for Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead, concentration on the early life puts the focus on Kesey’s development both as a person and as a writer. Dodgson makes excellent use of Kesey’s personal journal from the 1950s as well as Kesey’s letters at the University of Oregon, materials in family possession, publications by and about Kesey, and numerous interviews. Because Kesey often spoke and sometimes wrote enigmatically, masking true feelings with deceptively simple vernacular language, the best comprehension of Kesey’s thinking at a particular moment often comes from Kesey’s friends, Ken Babbs, Vic Lovell, and Robert Stone.

Dodgson’s book enhances our understanding of the early 1960s, LSD, and Kesey. This impeccably researched and carefully written book is an excellent contribution to the scholarly literature.


Diego Armus, Swarthmore College.

The history of cigarette smoking is growing and fast becoming a quite vibrant subfield of studies. A preliminary attempt to map the available scholarship reveals three ways of writing, each one with its particular emphasis but also with plenty of overlap because all three tend to discuss cigarette smoking as a practice framed by an array of biomedical, socio-cultural, economic, and political phenomena.

The first way of writing focuses its attention on the public health dimensions of smoking. Its topics weave epidemiological trends with public health policies and big tobacco corporations’ marketing strategies. It is a history both of public health and in public health, because those who practice it – mainly public health specialists and historians – want to find in historical processes a tool with which to influence the production and direction of public health anti-smoking agendas.

The second way of writing centers on the biomedical, disease-related dimensions of smoking, paying special attention to the production of specific knowledge by its key players: scientists, academic institutions, and corporate business.

Finally, the third way of writing approaches cigarette smoking as a socio-cultural practice crisscrossed by discourses, policies, and experiences. Its topics range from cigarette production to mass marketing and consumption, to the social meanings of cigarette smoking people create within particular historical contexts and distinct social settings. Thus, these histories delve into the visual and literary representations of smoking and smokers; the practice of smoking by men, women, youth, and children; and the critiques or celebrations of smoking as they were articulated in medical terms,
moral connotations, or individual rights and liberties. In the U.S., this way of writing has been dealing mainly with the cigarette as a consummate, very Anglo-American modern commodity that ended up penetrating and shaping daily life worldwide. In countries of the world periphery with strong and long smoking cultures, the scholarship has approached the cigarette as a socio-cultural site where local smoking styles accommodated and negotiated with the arrival of transnational corporate tobacco marketing.

These three ways of writing are present in *Golden Holocaust*. However, its dominant tone is that of a public health history of smoking in its most militant, anti-smoking version. Robert Proctor’s agenda is very clear from the book’s very first page: To unveil the tobacco industry’s perfidy in promoting the massive consumption of deadly cigarettes in the U.S. and worldwide. As a meticulous prosecutor, Proctor assumes the task of revealing how the cigarette became an artifact of mass culture; how biomedicine associated cigarette smoking with health hazards and risks, and how big tobacco corporations used a myriad of strategies in order to hide the dreadful and deadly consequences of cigarette smoking. The last chapter of the book lists twenty measures aiming at a total ban on the sale and manufacture of cigarettes. Proctor argues that humanitarian reasons justify this quite radical agenda in which societal issues associated with drastic prohibition – product adulteration, black markets and so on – are not relevant because smoking does not provide immediate pleasure intoxication and most smokers want to quit.

*Golden Holocaust* significantly enhances the literature on the history of the American cigarette in the twentieth century. It does so by using optical character recognition as a search strategy to delve into more than 70 million pages of an open-access archive (created as a result of a settlement reached after a series of successful lawsuits against the tobacco corporations). From beginning to end, the book offers a rich – at times overwhelming – narrative based on evidence produced by many involved actors, but mainly big cigarette manufacturers. In this respect, Proctor’s work is exemplary and very persuasive about the scientific fraud displayed time and again by the industry.

Part I focuses on the triumph of the cigarette by tracing with great detail eight crucial processes: the invention of flue curing, which made it possible for cigarette smoke to be inhaled; the invention of matches; the mechanization of cigarette making; the discovery of cigarette consumption as a taxation resource; the inclusion of cigarettes in soldiers’ ration during World War I; the mass marketing techniques; the manipulation of knowledge of hazards by the tobacco industry; and the manipulation of tobacco chemistry to increase the addictive qualities of tobacco. These are chapters where history of technology, history of taxation policies, and history of marketing organize Proctor’s narrative.

Part II is by and large biomedical history. It discusses early experimental oncology, from developments based in Central Europe and the US, to those done in Argentina – an interesting exploration into scientific production in the periphery – to Nazi Germany’s anti-tobacco science, to early tobacco-friendly research financed and encouraged by tobacco corporations.

Part III is the history of a deception, a sort of travelogue over several decades of corporate strategies to oppose, deny, or delay any initiative that will diminish its profits. With great detail, Proctor reconstructs the vast networks of U.S. academic institutions and experts – epidemiologists, statisticians, scientists, and in the 1990s, historians – whose research or services were funded or paid by tobacco corporations in order to undermine anti-smoking initiatives based on biomedical, behavioral or marketing ar-
arguments. In doing so, *Golden Holocaust* retraces many instances in which the industry tried to weaken the emerging biomedical consensus that associated cancer and cigarette smoking, like in the “Not Yet Proven” campaign of the early 1950s, efforts to deal with cigarette smoking as a habit and not an addiction in the 1960s, or in the array of tools – from public opinion polls, to consumer letters, to internal industry assessments – utilized to deliberately induce ignorance or doubt within the population at large.

Part IV continues with the indictment of the tobacco industry, this time focusing on the toxic substances present in the cigarettes, the fallacy of the “safer” cigarette, and the global epidemic of tobacco-related diseases.

More than a history of smoking in the U.S., Proctor’s book is a history of very sophisticated and ever-evolving strategies designed by the industry to survive anti-smoking efforts. While non-consequential for quite some time, these attempts became very effective by the end of the century, when passive smoking became a decisive argument that consolidated a new anti-tobacco consensus. Once (p. 552), Proctor recommends to listen to the voices of the consumers. But smokers are almost absent in his narrative. And if they appear at all, they do so as poor victims of skilful and always updated campaigns of manipulation or as addictive consumers who want to quit but cannot. Other histories of smoking have dealt with the complex and diverse world of the smokers; their “careers” as heavy or occasional smokers; the social functions of smoking; the cultural meanings smoking had for different groups. These are just examples of a longer list. There is no doubt that these dimensions were not relevant in Proctor’s research agenda. For him, the focus goes – and must go – over the doings of one of the deadliest modern industries.


Joseph B. Askew, University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China.

Brill has just released Hans Derks’ panoramic view of the opium trade in Asia, coming in at over 800 pages. In this large volume Derks attempts to cover the entire history of opium as it relates to the West’s relations with Asia. However, the final result is somewhat mixed.

On the positive side, Derks provides a global perspective that has been largely missing in other works. This volume does not focus on one single country, but attempts to look at the history of opium over the whole of Asia. That provides a useful depth and an opportunity for comparison that is sorely needed. Certainly for this reviewer, reading about drug production outside his area of speciality, this book was often informative and interesting. This volume also contains a large and useful bibliography that could be profitably consulted by many academics.

On the negative side, as is inevitable for any author who works in many areas without any formal training, the discussions of specific countries tends to be derivative and highly dependent on a very small number of authors. Derks’ coverage of China and the Chinese in Southeast Asia, for instance, features well known names like Carl Trocki with some frequency. This problem is made even more apparent given the paucity of primary Asian materials used in this work. Even among the secondary literature, there is a shortage of new and original materials, especially from Asian sources. This reason for this soon becomes apparent. Chinese names are rarely cited correctly. Chen Yong-fa’s surname, for instance, is Chen and yet neither the author nor his editors managed
to list his, and many other Chinese names, correctly in the bibliography.

These are relatively minor problems with the work given the larger problem in the author’s approach. To his credit Derks does not hide behind a façade of academic impartiality and begins with a condemnation of the Bush administration. Central to this work is the idea that the West was engaged in, as the subtitle of this book puts it, an “assault on the East.” That opium exports were part of a conscious effort by the West to weaken Asia in preparation for invasion seems an interesting proposition, but one that needs to be defended by more evidence than is provided in this work. Given the centrality of this claim, it is in fact rather surprising that so little evidence is produced to suggest that such a deliberate policy was ever conceived. It is all the more exceptional given so much evidence is produced to the contrary. Derks admits that the first English export of opium from India was not to China but to England. Whether or not this comprised an assault on the English is unexplored. Similarly the book discusses cocaine production in the Dutch East Indies and Taiwan under the Japanese without making it clear whether or not this was intended as an assault on the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Sigmund Freud.

The lack of proper historical context is a source of serious concern. Derks examines the origins of the British opium trade in light of what it became, not what it was. When Warren Hastings sent the first cargo of opium to China, he could not foresee what opium would become in China. Nor could he be certain it would be smoked as opium was the basis of innumerable medicines. Opium was also legal in China if imported for medical purposes. No evidence is provided that Hastings intended to produce China’s later opium problems.

Had Derks considered the actual historical context, he would have reproduced the debate in Britain between those in favour of any trade and the rising Evangelical movement that saw opium as inherently sinful. Modern Chinese nationalism has taken up this last form of discourse and used opium as an excuse for many failings. Derks dismisses any deviation from this sort of discussion as “blaming the victim.” However that just raises more issues than it solves. If Chinese consumers knowingly chose to use opium, in what sense are they victims? The East India Company did not, and could not, force Chinese people to smoke opium. Every user made a personal choice to do so. In dismissing such arguments, Derks has largely overlooked a small but growing field that sees prohibition, not opium, as the problem in China. Even if he chose not to answer such critics, his work, with its lack of Chinese language sources, reproduces some of the worst of colonial scholarship. Derks denies Asians agency. In this volume little consideration is given to why individuals might choose to use opium. Asians are presented in a stereotypical way as passive agents of Western actions. The West is active, dynamic and powerful, the Asians passive and weak. When the British bring opium, the Chinese are somehow unable to choose not to smoke it. This is not surprising given that Derks’ discourse grows out of nineteenth century evangelical critiques of sinful products such as opium, albeit filtered through a moralising Marxist lens.

Further problems with Derks’ approach are found in his criticism of Frank Dikötter’s earlier work on race in China. Derks says that it is “remarkable” that Dikötter writes what he does “knowing its consequences when used at state levels and in state propaganda” (p. 597). This appears to be criticism of Dikötter’s motivation on political grounds. This is not helpful in an academic context. What makes it surprising is that Derks leaves himself open to similar criticisms: he repeatedly identifies every person of Jewish origins as a Jew, or in one case as a Zionist. This is made worse by Derks’ discussion of a “Jewish way” (p. 584) to deal drugs, descriptions of “Jewish opium
gangs” (p. 692) and by claims that, for instance, the American gangster Meyer Lansky logically must have known the Sassoon family (p. 698). While this starts out as interesting in that it highlights the Indian origins of merchants such as the Sassoons, after a while it becomes tiresome.

In conclusion Brill has produced an unexpected addition to their long and distinguished publication list. This sprawling work contains a very useful bibliography, but desperately needs a strong editorial hand. It provides little value to the average undergraduate and should be used with caution.


Alcohol in World History is a brief survey covering the production, distribution, use, abuse, cultural impact, and regulation of ethanol from the Neolithic Revolution to the present. It appears in a Routledge series edited by Peter Stearns, who has recruited specialists to write about selected topics (e.g., food, sport, religion) in the context of world history. The object is to provide thematically focused companion volumes for world-history textbooks and document collections.

Gina Hames, who researches alcohol and gender history and who teaches Latin American and world history at Pacific Lutheran University, takes the charge of global coverage seriously. She includes extensive material on Africa and Asia as well as Europe and the Americas. There is even a section on Saudi Arabia, where sub rosa drinking has become commonplace, especially among westernized elites. Reading it, I could not help but recall a distant bridge-table conversation with a visiting Egyptian physician. “Of course people in Islamic countries drink,” he said with a dismissive wave. “They just keep the bottle under the sink.”

Much else in Alcohol in World History will be familiar to the readers of this journal. Perhaps it will be too familiar, expressed as it is in prose aimed at first-year undergraduates. Yet Hames has a knack for making comparisons across cultures. Her verdict is that the similarities and continuities are more impressive than the differences and discontinuities. In most civilizations alcohol served as an important source of nutrition and medication as well as recreation and intoxication. It was widely and, as preservation improved, distantly traded. It offered the means of cultural and colonial expansion, well-tended vineyards being as sure a sign of Roman presence as roads. It demarcated religion, ethnicity, and class, as when elites drank wine and the masses drank beer. It reinforced and often defined gender identity. It lubricated the wheels of vice and sexual misconduct. It financed states, armies, and empires. And it everywhere prompted nervous surveillance. All agriculture-based civilizations found ways to culturally integrate alcohol, though never perfectly and never in a fashion that completely eliminated its risks.

The particular customs – who should prepare alcoholic beverages, who should consume them, what spices should be added, what rituals observed – varied in accordance with local conditions. So did the alcoholic content of the beverages, which ranged from a few percentage points for traditional drinks like chicha or pulque all the way up to 40 or 50 percent for spirits like vodka or gin. Broadly speaking, the lower the alcohol content, the greater the nutritional value; the higher the alcohol content, the greater the risk of intoxication, organ damage, and loss of control over drinking. That was why many temperance advocates approved of the moderate use of beer and wine, though
not of potent mixed drinks like rum punch or, worst of all, spirits drunk neat.

The intertwined industrial and transportation revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made strong alcoholic beverages cheaper and more widely available, triggering a “virtually universal rise in alcohol use” (p. 79) and attendant social problems. Alarmed civic groups and reform leaders pressed for stricter regulation, yet failed to maintain permanent bans. “The centrality of alcohol to society,” Hames concludes, “thwarted prohibition efforts everywhere” (p. 80).

The virtue of her book is that it shows, through examples drawn from many cultures, just what this centrality entailed. Alcohol was tied to life’s good things, like wedding feasts and fine dining and solvent governments, but also to gambling, prostitution, disease, squalor, domestic abuse, crime, corruption, and the fleecing of subalterns. Victorian moral reformers – and, often, anti-colonialists like Mohandas Gandhi, who was a bit of both – saw booze as the boulder athwart the path of progress. They went at it with a relish, though with few lasting results. By the late 1920s the international dry crusade had largely run its course.

The alcohol industry recovered smartly from the reform crisis. It has since prospered by marketing its goods in every corner of the world. The African miner who drinks bottled beer, the Indian entrepreneur who sips pricey scotch, the Japanese bon vivant who orders a bottle of French wine: They are signaling, not only their taste in alcoholic beverages, but also what Hames calls their “Westernness” (p. 125). It is as though the role once played by the cigarette as a multivalent symbol of modernity has been assumed, in the aftermath of tobacco’s health scandals, by branded alcoholic beverages. Their manufacturers promote them under the quatrefoil banner of status, sex, sociability, and salubrity, with a friendly wink and a reminder that it is up to you to “drink responsibly.”

Alcohol in World History contains obvious gaps. Price and consumption data are fragmentary; sometimes it is unclear whether percentage changes refer to aggregate levels or to rates. Medicalization gets only passing mention. Celebrated medical investigators like Benjamin Rush, Thomas Trotter, Magnus Huss, Bénédict Morel, and Sergei Korsakoff are conspicuous by their absence. The same is true of celebrated drinkers such as Alexander the Great and Joseph Stalin, whose alcoholic and behavioral excesses many biographers think linked. (Alcohol is many things, but one of them is fuel for tyrants.) Then again, the book is brief by design. Hames has chosen, I think wisely, to devote her 146 pages to comparative cultural history – her long suit – and to sacrifice some familiar figures for more coverage of nonwestern regions featured in the world-history syllabi whose readings her book is meant to supplement.


Reviewed by William Haydock, Bournemouth University.

The back of Intoxication and Society informs the reader that intoxicants are “a continuing obsession” – which will probably ring true with most readers of this journal. It's certainly possible to make this case at the moment, as e-cigarettes disrupt established understandings of a familiar drug, DSM-V is published to (at best) mixed reviews and Novel Psychoactive Compounds arrive on the market at a rate of more than one a week.
In this context, it makes a great deal of sense to publish a book such as this combining a variety of disciplinary perspectives from neuroscience, through law, social science and history to English literature. The inarguable premise behind this collection of essays is that “the problem of intoxication transcends the boundaries of any single academic discipline” (p. 1). The aim of the book is to develop “a richer and more inclusive dialogue regarding the causes, characteristics and consequences of intoxicant use in modern societies” (pp. 1-2).

As you’d expect with a wide collection of essays, there are interesting titbits and insights throughout the book – and because of the book’s wide range of perspectives, it’s likely that most readers will find something new to spark their interest. One of my personal highlights was James Brown describing a mid-seventeenth-century scheme to remove the profit motive from brewers in Southampton, which reminded me of the Central Control Board’s scheme in Carlisle in the early twentieth century.

Each chapter, with its specific remit, could be useful as an introduction to a particular area of the academic study of intoxicants. Arlie Loughnan and Rebecca Williams, for example, both offer interesting discussions of the concepts of specific and basic intent in law, while Angus Bancroft’s chapter – amongst others – includes a fantastic range of references, which offer a useful starting point for those who wish to follow up specific points in more detail. Indeed, the introduction itself could stand alone as an introduction to many of the wide-ranging issues and debates relating to drugs and intoxication.

However, a collection such as this should aim to add something as a whole, beyond the juxtaposition of perspectives in itself. It could be argued that the range of issues raised in the book, and the variety of lenses used to observe them, undermines the utility of the singular term “intoxicants.” And yet I did find that there were key unifying factors. All the discussions of the nature of intoxicants and the challenges they pose for societies strike at what it means to be human. In Thomas Adams’ *Mysticall Bedlam* from 1615, quoted in Cathy Shrank’s chapter on tropes of intoxication in early modern literature, he describes drunkenness as a “voluntary madness” that makes man like a “beast” (p. 198). The issues of what makes one “mad,” and when this “madness” should be considered voluntary still resonate across the perspectives represented in this book, and they cannot be addressed by one discipline in isolation.

The premise behind Adams’ description is that rationality is the line that divides humans from animals. On this point, Bancroft argues that the current popularity amongst policymakers of behavioural economics and nudging raises interesting questions for the study of intoxicants. The fundamental premise of this approach is that human beings are not in fact rational, calculating creatures. Taking such a view, is the “addict” quoted by Darin Weinberg saying “it’s like there are two sides of me” (p. 237) so different from any other member of society?

This question of rationality is one of a range of issues running through *Intoxication and Society* that can be expressed as binaries: sober/intoxicated; rational/irrational; human/bestial; mind/body; psychological/physiological; motivation/action; voluntary/involuntary. Noting the difficulties in drawing such lines regarding autonomy and rationality in the field of legal responsibility, Alan Bogg and Jonathan Herring recommend “sensitive judgements of degree” rather than “bright-line binary distinctions” (p. 247) – a position to some extent supported by the neuroscientific approach to distinguishing between intoxicants and “natural rewards” outlined by Karen Ersche (p. 220).

Given this potential for dissolving “bright-lined distinctions,” the only real disappointment of this book is that the opportunity is not taken up more forcefully. Although
these ideas of rationality and selfhood are not the only way to approach the study of intoxicants; they do illustrate a way in which the book as a whole could have had more of an overarching shape. Chapters could perhaps have engaged directly with each other more, with each section considering specific questions, for example, and to my mind there could have been engagement with some of the fundamental philosophical questions underlying the discussions, regarding ideas of autonomy, rationality, the will, and the self. On the general point of coherence and coordination, there are instances of overlap and repetition. For example, one (admittedly fascinating) court case (R v. Kingston 1995) is discussed on four occasions. On the other hand, this is a consequence of the decision to make the essays self-contained, which has its advantages – and the book is not designed to be a textbook.

Given the scale of the questions Intoxicants and Society raises, and the range of perspectives given, on occasion I put the book down feeling somewhat overwhelmed and befuddled. However, given the purpose of the book, I saw this as a good thing (rather than reflecting my irrationality). The editors introduce the book as an attempt to “start conversations rather than offer definitive and conclusive remarks” (p. 24). To make such definitive remarks would certainly be a mistake in the field of intoxicants. Here’s to a contribution that makes the future of the field look a little blurry.