



Book Review

Principles of Biochemical Toxicology (3rd edition)

John Timbrell Taylor & Francis:
London/Philadelphia
1999, 394 pp., hardback £55;
paperback £26.95

A complete update of the lay-out has caused a metamorphosis of the textbook '*Principles of Biochemical Toxicology*'. The attractive appearance invites the reader to open and explore the now available 3rd edition of this basic text on toxicology.

Novel typesetting and formatting of the text in two columns on wider and marginally taller sized pages have considerably improved the readability of the text as well as the presentation and clarity of the figures and tables. Conversely, the page numbers, the font size of which has been reduced, and the page headers, inverted white on a black bar, have suffered somewhat from the new lay-out. On roaming around the new book, I noticed that I needed to look for a section heading, a table, or a figure legend to find out the chapter number. In a modern textbook, one would expect chapter or section numbers to be present in the page header. However, these points of critique are largely outweighed by the marked improvements of the lay-out and the format of the book. The new edition is an easy-to-read textbook which is still sufficiently small to hold by hand.

A first survey of the book's contents learns that the author has included *Summary* sections and *Review questions* at the end of each chapter. Answers to the questions are presented in a separate section

immediately following the last chapter of the book. This is a welcome addition, which will facilitate the independent acquisition of knowledge by the student. The author's experience from '*Study Toxicology Through Questions*' has likely contributed to the quality of this extension of the textbook. It should be noted that the questions intend to test the ability of the student to reproduce the factual information offered in the text, which is important but not sufficient to attain an academic level of thinking in toxicology.

The information contained by the 3rd edition of '*Principles of Biochemical Toxicology*' has hardly changed from that contained by the 2nd edition, which was prepared in 1991 and reprinted several times. In his preface the author acknowledges, in an almost apologetic way, that he was granted little time for revising the contents of the book. This is somewhat disappointing, as it is important to let students share in some of the more recent developments in the field. On close inspection, I found few parts of the text revised, e.g., the description of the regulation of apoptosis, which might further benefit from a schematic presentation of this multifactorial process, and some details on the classification and nomenclature of cytochrome P450 iso-enzymes. Bibliographical references following each chapter have also been updated. The complete references are arranged according to the subjects treated in the foregoing chapter and many of them refer to other toxicology textbooks. Although the bibliography is intended to provide

additional and in-depth information, the student is not particularly encouraged to extend his study beyond the limits of the book. Annotations indicating what to expect from consulting the references are given in very few cases only. For the inexperienced student it may be more appealing to get a balanced introduction into sources containing toxicological information, including the rapidly expanding internet sources, than to be confronted with a list of references containing information beyond the level required for the imminent examination. This becomes the more important as the emphasis of academic teaching is shifted from information transfer towards raising interest for and revealing concepts underlying the structure of a specific field of science. In the end, curiosity is the driving force for discovery. Contemplating on the author's citation from '*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*' by Lewis Carroll, I realized that, when Alice drinks the contents of a mysterious small bottle, her curiosity prevails over her reservations concerning the possible risks involved.

Although I would like to encourage further adaptation of the contents for teaching in a contemporary academic environment, '*Principles of Biochemical Toxicology*' in its novel, improved appearance remains an affordable textbook, which provides a solid basis for toxicological science, and we will continue its use for this purpose in the introductory part of our annual toxicology courses.

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