

## Book Reviews

medicine like the present reviewer, the most interesting chapter is that on 'Aetiology and Social Epidemiology'. Neurosyphilitics embodied late-Victorian and Edwardian concerns with the ill effects of "degeneracy" (moral and social as well as medical) and with the positive benefits of eugenics. Patients were assessed and treated, but they were also judged, their social status influencing both diagnosis and care; some were not treated at all.

While usually confident and well-balanced in its judgments, the book still has some of the structure (and caution) of a thesis, notably when reviewing the literature and explaining sources and methods. Yet it is bold in trying to open up the history of psychiatry, and in passing it touches on points that suggest new avenues for social historians of medicine. Indeed, the fact that Davis's work provokes such thoughts testifies to her achievement rather than detracting from it. Asylum records and medical writings are well employed, but how were these ideas mediated to a wider public through newspapers or the pulpit? How did the law of mental incapacity influence institutionalization, understandings of madness, and therapies? Using other sources like family correspondence (or perhaps even methods like oral history) might allow those who follow Davis to explore more fully how patients or their relatives reacted to diagnosis and treatment: did they, for example, subscribe to the lapsarian constructions of some doctors and social theorists? Issues of gender are effectively discussed without being laboured, though one might have expected more on prostitution as a social and moral issue, as this was presumably how the nearly-all-male institutionalized sufferers from neurosyphilitic disorders were infected.

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**John Parascandola,** *Sex, sin, and science: a history of syphilis in America*, Healing Society: Disease, Medicine, and History series,

Westport, CT, and London, Praeger, 2008, pp. xx, 195, illus., £27.95, \$49.95 (hardback 978-0-275-99430-3).

For medical historians, the concept that a disease has a biography within a social, cultural and political frame that varies from culture to culture and over time is an analytic given. However, for students and the public new to this kind of thinking, even in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, there is still the sense of wonderment that comes from realizing that not just seemingly scientific information shapes the naming, aetiology, and treatment of diseases. In the hope of furthering this understanding, the former US Public Health Service (PHS) historian John Parascandola has written a short book about the scourge of the sexually transmitted, and once terrifying, disease of syphilis. His focus on blame, sexuality, the loss of civil liberties, and silences about sex shape this synthetic disease biography.

The book begins with a re-examination of the debates over the disease's first appearance in Naples in 1495 and the questions on whether the affliction was taken to the New World by Columbus's men, or transported back by them as unacknowledged plunder that wrecked biological havoc. The author weighs the recent evidence on the DNA and transformations of *Treponema pallidum*, the spirochete that causes syphilis, which may help us to settle finally this old argument. Explanations for why women, and in particular prostitutes, were blamed as the source of the disease are familiar, but Parascandola relates this tale with an eye to summarizing other historians and providing some new evidence of the efforts to protect the "innocent". He discusses carefully the belief that the disease was hereditary, rather than congenital, and how long it took (after the Second World War) for this idea to be disproved.

Parascandola traces syphilis as it spread through the various populations in colonial America into the twentieth century. As an historian of pharmacy, he is particularly

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sensitive to the various drugs and cures that were purported to have an effect on syphilis, and he covers this aspect of the history with great care. Specialists concerned with the disease will, in particular, appreciate the way he explores the history of differing treatment regimens of both the seemingly scientific and quack cures. Parascandola's emphasis on the link between medical inspection and regulation of prostitution serves as a reminder of the extent to which the power seized by public health officials has always been underlined by the threat of infectious, and particularly sexually transmitted, disease. His analysis of how the concept of the "innocent victim" became part of public discourse is thoughtful and thorough, although those who know the extensive literature on the social hygiene movements and the efforts to police working-class women's sexuality will find this recognizable ground.

Parascandola draws upon his earlier work on the role of the government and media in the effort to control syphilis. Making use of the primary materials, he provides more detailed insight into the rise of the PHS's Venereal Disease Division and the continued struggles it and the American Social Hygiene Association had between the wars to gain support for their efforts. The reproduction of posters and propaganda about syphilis drive home his points visually. Parascandola has done an excellent job of relying upon the secondary literature in the areas of the history where he has not spent time in the archives. He concludes by bringing the story up to the AIDS era, focusing on what was never learned.

The result is a readable disease biography that will provide new insights for those who do know the literature on the history of syphilis. It will introduce those who are unfamiliar with the disease to its historical lineage and still unanswered questions.

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**John Kirkup**, *The evolution of surgical instruments: an illustrated history from ancient times to the twentieth century*, Novato, CA, Norman Publishing, 2006, pp. xviii, 510, 30 colour illus., 527 black and white illus., \$275.00 (hardback 0-930405-86-2).

**John Kirkup**, *A history of limb amputation*, Heidelberg, Springer, 2007, pp vii, 184, illus., £100.00, €149.95, \$169.00 (hardback 978-1-84628-443-4).

Surgery is pivotal to modern medicine and we have excellent histories of specific operations, surgical theories and concepts, the professionalization of surgeons, and studies of the relations between surgery, science and industry. Yet the surgical tools that facilitate operations by manipulating tissue and bone have received little attention. John Kirkup, a retired surgeon and Honorary Curator of the Historic Instruments Collection at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, has researched the history of surgical instruments for over twenty years with the objectives of analysing "the long evolution of operative instrumentation" and classifying "instruments in such a way that their structure, composition and function can be followed in a logical fashion". *The evolution of surgical instruments* is the impressive outcome of this project. In scope, style, and detail its pages are redolent of eighteenth-century taxonomies of natural history. Its content is underpinned by a wide variety of sources including archaeological findings, surgical writings, instrument catalogues, and museum collections across the world.

An introductory section on surgical and technological factors and historical sources contains a chapter in which Kirkup develops his thesis that instruments evolved naturally from their human precursors—fingers, thumbs, nails and so on. Hence in earliest times, fingers could act as retractors or as dilators, prefiguring the later instruments created out of antlers or bone, and eventually bronze and steel. The merits of such an argument are debatable but it does serve to remind us of the intimacy between the surgeon