

Book Reviews

CHARLES MARX (editor), *Médecine, science et technique: recueil d'études rédigées à l'occasion du centenaire de la mort de Claude Bernard (1813-1878)*, Paris, Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984, 8vo, pp. 130, Fr.60.00.

The five papers collected in this small volume were first presented to the Seminar on the Foundations of the Sciences at the University of Strasbourg in 1978, to mark the centenary of the death of Claude Bernard. The focus of the seminar was not, however, the work of Bernard but the development of medicine, and its relationship with science and technology, in the hundred years since 1878. Thus only the first paper, by Yvette Conry ('Le "point de vue" de la médecine expérimentale selon Claude Bernard: une utopie positive?'), is concerned in any detail with Bernard himself. Conry characterizes Bernard's philosophy of science as a positive variant of utopianism, and she argues the shortcomings of this philosophy by setting out Bernard's views on bacteriology, statistics, clinical medicine, and cellular pathology, and then juxtaposing them with the subsequent development of each of these disciplines after his death.

The next three papers range very widely indeed. Jean Schwartz ('Pharmacologie, médecine et expérimentation clinique') discusses the problems encountered in contemporary pharmacological research and in clinical trials of new drugs. François Gremy and Jean-Claude Pages ('Médecine informatique: bilan et perspectives') report on recent developments in the areas of computer-assisted decision-making in medicine and in computer-assisted medical education. (This paper in fact dates from 1983, but an earlier version by Gremy alone was presented to the Strasbourg seminar in 1978.) And Lucien Israel ('Le résidu Psy') considers the question of psychosomatic illness and, more broadly, the effects of unconscious mental processes in all therapeutic relations and indeed in all aspects of human life.

The final paper, by Georges Canguilhem ('Puissance et limites de la rationalité en médecine'), takes up the theme, championed by Bernard, of scientific experimentation as the basis of rationality in medicine. Echoing some of the points raised in the papers of Conry and Israel, Canguilhem discusses the nature of the limits within which medical rationality must operate. But he also goes on to develop a strong polemic against the irrationalist elements in Illich's *Medical nemesis* and the "expropriation of health" thesis generally. Both the breadth of this topic and the thoughtfulness of Canguilhem's approach make his paper easily the most interesting contribution to the volume.

Like most published conference proceedings, this one presents the reader with a very heterogeneous collection of papers. The editor attempts, in his introduction, to provide a structure for the whole but succeeds only nominally. If, instead of attempting to cover the last hundred years of medical development in five short papers, the volume had taken a more restricted topic as its theme, then no doubt it would have been easier to present the result with some sense of unity.

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JEAN-CHARLES SOURNIA, *Histoire de l'alcoolisme*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986, 8vo, pp. 323, Fr.125.00 (paperback).

Given its importance, past and present, it is quite peculiar how little has been written on the history of alcoholism—or, to speak less anachronistically, about the interface between alcohol-related problems and medicine. Doctors were, of course, deeply involved with the properties of alcohol—both therapeutic and pathological—long before the deleterious effects of hard and habitual drinking were elevated to official disease status during the course of the nineteenth century. But wide-ranging English-language books in this area have concentrated their attention principally on the temperance movement in England and on prohibition in the United States (and have rightly pointed out that the medical profession's involvement with both these movements was, at most, ambivalent).

In the light of this neglect, Professor Sournia's history of alcoholism is particularly welcome. Like Sournia's other forays into medical history, this is a survey based upon extensive familiarity with secondary scholarship rather than archival delvings. It is modest in its goals, and unsophisticated in

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its methodology (no grappling here with Foucault or the social construction of disease) and none the worse for that. Its chronological span is complete (chapter 1 is entitled 'Les Buveurs Antiques'), and though the focus becomes increasingly medical as we approach the present, the attitudes of preachers, moralists, and governments are not neglected. For the Anglo-Saxon reader, it is particularly valuable to be reminded that there have been temperance movements elsewhere. In chapter 8, Sournia offers a highly illuminating account of how far it was working-men's organizations and socialist guilds which promoted temperance in nineteenth-century France and central Europe: not social control but a self-control which would fortify political strength.

Professor Sournia's account of medical change is somewhat thin on eighteenth-century developments (a rather derivative and sometimes inaccurate account of the "gin craze" followed by a short section on Thomas Trotter). The work of nineteenth-century doctors is much more fully represented. A lucid account is offered of Magnus Huss, which does not stint the importance of Swedish Lutheranism, and Sournia also writes well about the "psychiatrization" of drink problems within the development of mid-nineteenth-century degenerationist thought. Here, one misses, however, adequate reference to the parallels between alcoholism and other contemporary addiction phenomena (e.g., the medical use and abuse of opium and other narcotics). The last chapters survey medical attempts world-wide to counter the present epidemic of alcoholism.

Medical historians are currently paying increasing attention to the "diseases of civilization". The history of the emergence of the idea of addiction and of its medical treatment still remains, however, under-researched. Professor Sournia has made a workmanlike and readily usable contribution to that understanding. One hopes that an English translation will appear in the not too distant future.

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ALFRED W. CROSBY, *Ecological imperialism. The biological expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 8vo, pp. 368, illus., £27.50/£9.95 (paperback).

In his latest contribution to ecologically-based historical narrative, A. W. Crosby uses a broad range of primary and secondary historical and ecological sources to document the impact of what he calls the "portmanteau biota" of Old World crops, livestock, weeds, people, and pathogens on previously isolated biological communities in the Pacific, the Americas, and the Atlantic islands. After a brief survey of the failure of the Norse and the Crusaders in the early Middle Ages to establish a permanent foothold in areas either too remote or densely populated, the author suggests that the ecological consequences of European contact and settlement on the eastern Atlantic islands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD display a pattern which would be repeated in later centuries in temperate zones of the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand. In favourable climatic conditions similar to those of Europe, imported animal and plant species could multiply rapidly at the expense of native species while indigenous human societies which were initially able to resist European military technology on nearly equal terms succumbed to hunger and disease. While malnutrition would have magnified the effect of disease on native groups unable to fight and farm simultaneously, their epidemiological vulnerability played an important role. The newly arrived European sailors, soldiers, and settlers would have included carriers of Old World diseases which made the most of the opportunity to attack previously unexposed populations. Although smallpox, tuberculosis, and measles can sometimes be identified, the specific pathogens responsible for many epidemics remain unknown. The micro-organisms responsible for the *peste* said to have destroyed 60–75 per cent of the Gran Canaria Guanches in the late fourteenth century cannot be identified with certainty any more than can those that caused the *modorra*, which eliminated several thousand besieged defenders of Tenerife in 1495, or the later Maori epidemic called *papareti* after a Maori toboggan because of the swift downhill slide of the dying.