

## Book Reviews

physicians to hone their clinical skills. However, German doctors seemingly felt that hospital training was a worthless preparation for private practice, since the individuality of the sick vanished in the wards and the hapless inmates were reduced to their diseases. This development stood in sharp contrast to conditions in France and readers might have expected a brief explanation concerning these differences in approach.

Another paper by Alfons Labisch discusses the roots of Germany's 1883 sickness insurance law designed to prevent labourers and their families being adversely affected by illness and thus becoming paupers. The author stresses that, more than a health policy, this legislation should be seen as Bismarck's attempts to regulate welfare and labour. Although in the beginning medical services were infrequent, the intrusion of a third party payer ruled by trade unions in the patient/physician relationship cast the latter into the role of employees, eventually triggering the organization of vigorous professional associations and tribunals. Labisch tells us that by 1900, nearly 20 per cent of German physicians faced lawsuits, instituted by the tribunals against nonconformist members practising alternative medicine. Similarities with conditions in the US beg for further analysis.

Other valuable papers follow, arranged in a somewhat chronological form. Rather than considering it simply an inevitable ingredient for Hitler's ideology, Richard Evans' historiographical essay concerning the multifaceted aspects of Social Darwinism tries to show their development, especially in the context of World War I and its aftermath. Charles McClelland, in turn, examines the professionalization process of German physicians during the first decades of the twentieth century, opting for a set of economic and political reasons to explain its "arrest" and susceptibility to National Socialism. There are also two contributions about psychiatry, an essay on sterilization, and another on the politics of abortion from the Weimar Republic to the postwar period. Finally, Geoffrey Cocks

eloquently discusses the background to the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial, noting the growing corporatism of German medical professionals from the early 1900s onward, their authority bolstered by the medicalization of society and perceived needs of the state.

The collection concludes with the near-contemporary story of a former Nazi physician, Hans Sewering, who in 1992 became the president elect of the World Medical Association. The events, lucidly narrated by a participant, the historian Michael H Kater, trace back Sewering's membership in the party and the SS, as well as his participation in the Third Reich's euthanasia programme. Following postwar "denazification" hearings, this physician became politically involved in German medical affairs, reaching the presidency of the German Medical Association in 1973. Kater's chronicle recounts the growing opposition to Sewering's candidacy and his eventual withdrawal, while exposing the inherent political conservatism still prevailing in the highest circles of organized German medicine. As with another recent volume on institutions of confinement, the German Historical Institute is to be congratulated for its publication series and efforts to stimulate discussion about health related topics.

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**Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland and Hans de Waardt** (eds), *Illness and healing alternatives in western Europe*, Studies in the Social History of Medicine, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, pp. xi, 272, £50.00 (0-415-13581-8).

This collaboration among social and medical historians, with one anthropologist thrown in for good measure, has resulted in a stimulating collection of essays which profitably comments on the connections between healing, magic and religious belief in Europe from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. A central issue is to what

extent the approaches to illness and healing have become “disenchanted” during this period or not. The authors have drawn on a broad range of archival sources, medical literature and field studies (as far as the more recent history is concerned).

The studies in this volume show that Max Weber’s concept of the “disenchantment of the world” may be perfectly applicable to many phenomena, but lack of uniformity and divergent trends defeat the notion of “disenchantment” as a single, universal, scientific category. One might ask, however, why magic beliefs should interest medical historians. The argument that such a system of knowledge or belief has been subjected to criticism and labelling, both by contemporaries and by later historians or folklorists is not, in my opinion, sufficient. The best answer perhaps is given in Matthew Ramsey’s essay on magical healing in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France in which he points out that at the end of this millennium “witchcraft and magical healing, which lost their metaphysical authenticity three centuries ago, have regained a cultural authenticity” that would have astonished our ancestors. In the case of witchcraft this assumption is confirmed by Hans de Waardt for eighteenth-century Holland and Enrique Perdiguero for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain. Gillian Bennett and Ineke van Wetering present examples of old and new religious, occult or magical “repertoires” of illness and healing up to the present day, describing, for example, the persistent belief in the ability of snakes to inhabit the human body or the cultural transfer of the Creole *Winti* healing tradition to present-day Amsterdam. The essays by Cornelia Osborne and Sarah Ferber indicate that illness and healing alternatives have to do with a different perception, which is deeply imbedded in the language people use to describe and explain sickness.

The issue of rationality of past notions of illness and healing is also dealt with in this volume. Stuart Clark demonstrates that the notion that devils could cause disease was a rational belief in the context of academic

medicine in the later medieval and early modern period. Later the founder of homoeopathy, Dr Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) and his many “converted” followers referred to his new art of healing as “rational”, as Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra points out in her fascinating paper on religious metaphors and the complex relations between healing and belief. How an explanation of illness was considered rational in one context and rejected as irrational in another is elaborated by Gary Waite, showing that already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Dutch spiritualists and Mennonites faced the dilemma of accepting the notion of the devil causing diseases, preferring naturalistic explanations of supposed magical phenomena. Albrecht Burkhard and Willem Frijhoff provide two interesting biographical studies which demonstrate that in one case the authorities imposed their rationality over what they considered superstition, while in the other they did not.

There can be no doubt that the new wave of alternative or complementary medicine in Europe prompts us to think further about the ways in which sickness behaviour is historically determined. We should be grateful to the editors of this fine volume for opening up this promising avenue of research and proposing a powerful, if not always convincing, interpretation.

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**Marcos Cueto**, *El regreso de las epidemias. Salud y sociedad en el Perú del siglo XX*, Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1997, pp. 256, illus., \$25.00 (in the Americas), £25.00 (rest of the world) (9972-51-011-5).

Cueto’s book is a collection of historical essays, some published previously, and it concludes with a chapter on a new development in the area of epidemic disease in Peru: the cholera epidemics of 1991. It is, however, more than just a loose collection of