

## Book Reviews

Benthamism—which conceived of prisoners as “different from normal people ... [in need of] firm and extensive management from the outside” (p. 46). This carceral turn to an ideology normally associated with enabling citizens to seek their own greatest happiness was not unique to Britain. Alexis de Tocqueville, after all, had remarked on the “complete despotism” in American prisons, all the more noteworthy because of the new republic’s “extended liberty”. Wiener’s essay offers the most sustained and nuanced reading of Benthamism and medicine—especially the dilemma faced by physicians contemplating efforts at “preventive medicine”—and is particularly incisive in cautioning against “binary thinking”: envisaging prison medical officers as either lackeys of the penitentiary, or the prisoners’ advocates.

The complicity of prison medical officers in “surveillance, individualization, and normalization” is in fact the focus of Joe Sim’s essay, which rejects the Enlightenment version of “rational progress and benevolent development which has dominated social science discourse about modern institutions in general and medicine in particular” (p. 103)—a vision, by the way, which has clearly *not* been in dominance for the past two decades, when most of the social histories of medicine have been written. Prison medical officers, in Sim’s view, were unambiguously associated with the maintenance of discipline and order in the institution. To be sure, he has unearthed haunting examples of medical participation in inhumane and depraved medical practices to give pause to unreconstructed Enlightenment historians—if there are any living. Still, invoking the Foucauldian paradigm of “power/knowledge” by employing a term such as “prison medicine’s knowledge base” suggests rather more than it delivers. Essays throughout this collection repeatedly point to the haphazard state of prison medicine in general, and psychiatry in particular—surely the most *controlling* of medical specialties. Further, mental medicine appears to have been held in low regard by prison administrators and prisoners alike.

Other essays in this volume—although narrower in scope—highlight the developing medical officer’s role, and the rise of the first criminal lunatic asylum. Richard Smith identifies the challenge facing medical officers who contemplated providing psychological counselling to the prisoners, but worried that such service might bestow a medical imprimatur to the practice of keeping the mentally disordered in prison. And Sir Louis Blom-Cooper takes up the plight of the psychologically disturbed offender as he recounts the history of Broadmoor and subsequent attempts to attend to the special needs of criminal lunatics, reminding the reader of the seemingly inexorable progression of construction, to expansion, to overcrowding.

Taken together, the volume’s essays challenge the reader to consider the distance we have travelled in thinking about the health of prisoners. Although current thinking tends to separate physical and mental health needs from the objectives of punishment, opinion is still divided regarding the *appropriate* standard of medical attention, and how it should be delivered. Not everyone at the conference was convinced of the efficacy of new laws of reporting of prison conditions and/or abuse, or pleased with the standard of care—particularly if increased medical attention is equated with increased medical surveillance.

In keeping with the theme that united the conference, it might be good for readers to remind themselves that Benthamism was never about making everybody happy.

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**David A E Shephard**, *John Snow: anaesthetist to a queen and epidemiologist to a nation*, Cornwall, Canada, York Point Publishing (PO Box 843, Cornwall PE, C0A 1H0), 1995, pp. 373, illus., Canadian \$33.00, £15.65 (1-57087-103-5).

John Snow (1813–58) is an easy man to admire. He had none of the pomposity commonly found in self-made individuals. He

## Book Reviews

wrote a lot, using a simple and effective style. He died suddenly, in his prime, but not before producing work of lasting importance in two separate fields, anaesthesiology and epidemiology. He has a blue plaque in London and a society commemorating his name. Nevertheless, David Shephard's is the first full-length biography of this remarkable Victorian general practitioner.

Part of the reason for this undoubtedly is the absence of any collection of his correspondence and other private papers. Even the archives of people with whom he might be expected to have corresponded, such as Edwin Chadwick, are silent. The one exception are the three volumes of Snow's Case Books, held in the Library of the Royal College of Physicians of London, and recently transcribed and magnificently edited by the late Richard Ellis (*Medical History*, Supplement No. 14, 1994). The poignant dedication of Shephard's biography is a paste-over In Memoriam to Ellis and Roderick Calverley, two anaesthetists cut off in 1995, also in their primes.

Shephard has made good use of the Case Books, although Ellis's editorial apparatus and greater familiarity with Snow's handwriting were not available to him. The Case Books allow Shephard to comment on Snow's anaesthetic and general practice. For the most part, however, Shephard confines himself to Snow's published writings and what they say about his evolving ideas on the nature and mode of spread of cholera, and on the science and art of anaesthesia. His bibliography of Snow's writings is a full one, and every publication gets at least a mention. The discussion of Snow's epidemiological investigations during the 1854 cholera outbreak in London is especially cogent, for it goes beyond Snow's classic work around Broad Street, Soho, and his comparison of the cholera incidence in houses supplied by two different water companies, to scrutinize the immediate reception of Snow's findings. Shephard emphasizes that Snow never believed that contaminated water was the sole mode whereby cholera is spread (soiled bedding could be equally as effective), and provides a

sound analysis of the evidence Snow gathered in arguing that cholera is essentially a disease of the bowels, rather than of the blood. Not surprisingly, Shephard (himself an anaesthetist) has plenty to say about the other string to Snow's bow.

Occasionally, the lack of direct evidence leads Shephard to unnecessary poetic licence, and some of Snow's contemporaries are not treated as seriously or as fully as they deserve. Around the fringes, there are a few lapses: William Wilberforce was not MP for York when Snow was born, and nonconformists did not have a monopoly on evangelicalism. Erwin Ackerknecht's name is consistently misspelt. Nevertheless, we now have a full-length biography of Snow, and a good one. And if the book, as an object, is a rather poor thing, at least the price is right.

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**Joseph Lester**, *E Ray Lankester and the making of modern British biology*, ed. Peter J Bowler, BSHS Monographs 10, Faringdon, Oxon, British Society for the History of Science, 1995, pp. 220, illus., £9.00, \$17.00 (0-906450-11-X).

Ray Lankester, knight, the eminent, many-sided and controversial British biologist who rose to the high position of Director of the British Museum of Natural History, and was well known in his day for his popular scientific writings (often first published in newspapers, and then in books such as *From an easy chair* (1908) and *Science from an easy chair* (1910)), has long merited a biography. One has at last appeared from the pen of a retired Manchester schoolmaster, Joe Lester, now over ninety. Lester—who, like Lankester, was much interested in microscopy—began his studies of his “hero” back in the 1950s, when he was kindly allowed access to the Lankester papers by the biologist's descendants. But, although the main body of the text was written some thirty years ago, it appears that the project languished. Now, with the assistance of Peter