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It is only in his embryology that Descartes explicitly conceptualizes the self-organization of a living being simply as a result of the natural properties of matter. And it is here, in this embryological reworking of classical atomism, rather than in the physiology of the already-formed animal-machine, that Descartes' real mechanism is to be found.

It is not Descartes, therefore, but Lamarck who develops an entirely mechanistic conception of life—a conception which both recognizes the specificity of life (unlike the Cartesian concept of the animal-machine) and also makes life fully dependent on the properties of matter (unlike the animism of Georg-Ernst Stahl or the vitalism of Xavier Bichat). Lamarck's quaintly outdated physics, which was scientifically untenable even in his own day, should not blind us to the magnitude of his achievement, Pichot argues. For Lamarck's philosophical project still stands as a model (although one constructed with inadequate resources) of what modern biology has as yet been unable to achieve—a coherent concept of the specificity of life within the cognitive framework of the natural sciences.

Pichot's two post-Lamarckian chapters deal with 'Claude Bernard and experimentalism', and with 'Charles Darwin and Darwinism', respectively. His analysis here not only highlights the scientific advances made in these areas of biology (Bernard substituting physico-chemical determinism for Lamarck's mechanism, and Darwin substituting a selective evolutionary process for Lamarck's transformism), but it also seeks to demonstrate the philosophical shortcomings of later biological thought in comparison with the more comprehensive Lamarckian project.

Finally, in the book's conclusion, Pichot briefly sketches his own proposal for a scientifically adequate concept of the specificity of life, following Lamarck's strategy of according temporality a fundamental role in the notion of life itself. This sketch seems promising as an outline for further development and certainly serves to establish the plausibility of the philosophical approach that Pichot is advocating, but one

would need to see it worked out more fully before attempting to evaluate it.

While Pichot's *Histoire de la notion de vie* concerns itself with biological rather than medical thought, historians of medicine who have epistemological interests will find informative comments on a number of classic medical thinkers in this book. Apart from the physicians already named above, Pichot deals at some length with Hippocratic writers, Jean-Baptiste van Helmont, William Harvey, Hermann Boerhaave, and Friedrich Hoffmann; and in passing with several others. Some of Pichot's incidental judgements seem historically a bit quirky—as when he accuses first Albrecht von Haller (p. 424), then Hoffmann (p. 502), and finally various Darwinians (p. 789) of "bad faith" in their theoretical formulations—but the central strands of his discussion are tightly argued and amply documented.

This is a book that makes substantial demands on the reader, but it is one that many historians of medicine should find well worth the effort.

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Lara V Marks, *Model mothers: Jewish mothers and maternity provision in east London, 1870–1939*, Oxford Historical Monographs, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. xxi, 320, £35.00 (0-19-820454-X).

This well-researched and innovative study takes an intriguing paradox as its starting point. In the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, London's East End was notorious for its poverty and squalor—not surprisingly in view of its high concentration of unemployed, of casual labourers and of first-generation immigrants. In many respects, the Jewish community, concentrated around Whitechapel, attracted the chief attention, constituting what John Major might have termed the worst "eyesore". Having just fled from the ghettos of Eastern Europe, many East End Jews were exotic in their appearance and ways and spoke

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little English. Moreover, as Sander Gilman has recently stressed in *The Jew's body* (London, Routledge, 1991), these new arrivals were perceived through stereotypical images of the Ashkenazim as outlandish in body habits and dietary rituals, and as especially susceptible to ethnic diseases like scurvy (views reinforced by the eugenic movement). Not least, a large proportion of East End Jews were extremely poor, and were compelled to toil in scandalously cramped, stuffy, fume-laden and unhygienic workshops in the garment industry and other sweated trades.

And yet, as certain contemporary observers noted, often to their surprise, the Jewish community was remarkably healthy. "I was very much interested to learn", recorded one Medical Officer of Health in Stepney, "how it was that people who were living in close courts and crowded alleys under conditions that I was accustomed to find associated with high death rates wherever I had looked in London, had a low death rate". And those impressions are confirmed by the wealth of evidence, quantitative and qualitative alike, presented in Lara Marks's study, which takes particular note of the exceptionally favourable infant mortality figures amongst the Jews, and the signs of vigorous child and maternal health. Thus here we are presented with a case that provides fascinating food for thought in the light of broader McKeown-led debates regarding the historical determinants of ill-health in populations and the role played therein, directly or obliquely, by poverty itself.

Dr Marks believes that no facile resolution should be expected of the "poor but healthy" conundrum. She suggests that Jewish salubrity, particularly amongst neonates and infants, may reflect the fastidious kitchen habits demanded by kosher dietary rituals. The widely noted sobriety of the Jews probably meant that wages which amongst the neighbouring Irish dockers and navvies never got beyond the pub actually came home and were set aside for the family and for food. Not least, Jewish values idealized good mothering: it is at least possible that neighbourhood pressures turned the stereotypical good Jewish mother into a reality.

Moreover, alongside superior home management, the Jewish community, partly thanks to the energies and leadership of the Jewish Board of Guardians, was in the process of establishing a galaxy of philanthropic agencies (partly in order to avoid the shame of the workhouse): food, nursing and midwife charities, home helps, hospitals, and multitudes of other benefit societies, some contributory, many free. The impression created by *Model mothers* is that, by consequence of such support agencies, gross malnutrition and desperate want of domestic necessities may have threatened the health of East End Jews less than that of the Irish and of native cockney paupers. It is certainly some measure of the perceived bounty of health services contributed by the better-off and longer established that the Jewish Board of Guardians could actually recommend, in 1870, that *medical* provision be reined back, on the grounds that the local Poor Law services, together with non-Jewish charities, were already supplying such assistance in some profusion.

This fascinating observation is amply backed by Dr Marks's research. The East End may have been one of the poorest districts of London, indeed of England, but it was also acquiring an unusually comprehensive network of medical and similar charities, some supplied by local authorities, some by the Poor Law, and many by missions and other philanthropists. Certain of these fall-backs the Jew community chose to avoid wherever possible: they would customarily fight desperately hard to avoid the workhouse. Others were, of course, uncongenial to Jews, not least those evangelical missions that dangled welfare or medicine as the bait for religious conversion. But the impression is given that high take-up of charities (Jewish and non-Jewish alike) and other facilities may explain the puzzle of unexpectedly good Jewish health figures.

Despite the limiting sub-title, there is also much in this book that goes beyond specifically Jewish questions. Not least, Dr Marks's materials remind one again and again of the total inadequacy of any reading of the

people's health that would tell of a simple shift "from the Poor Law to the National Health Service". By the time of the Great War, a huge and intricate fabric of services was in place, of various kinds, funded by diverse sources, and tailored for differing sectors of society with distinct conditions and needs. One of the great works of the NHS lay not in *creating* services but in *systematizing* them and removing the elements of arbitrariness and class deference.

Finally, every page of *Model mothers* reminds us (we should, in truth, not need reminding any longer) of the irreducible localism and extraordinary heterogeneity of health provision. If the Stepney workhouse was generous with medicines, or the Whitechapel guardians provided kosher food in their infirmary, or if home helps were provided in Bethnal Green, you could be sure that things were arranged quite otherwise in Mile End or Limehouse. Not the least pleasure of this rich and rewarding book is to be brought face-to-face time and again with the exceptionally personal and variegated nature of metropolitan medical, nursing and hygiene services. Something like community care did exist, because those were the days of fiercely defined local communities with identities of their own. The support systems depicted in Michael Young and Peter Willmott's classic *Family and kinship in east London* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957) existed no less for the sustaining of health than for the upholding of family and cultural bonds.

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J B Lyons, *Surgeon Major Parke's African journey 1887–89*, Dublin, The Lilliput Press, 1994, pp. xiv, 281, £19.95 (1874675-20-1).

Thomas Heazle Parke was a twenty-nine year old military surgeon of modest achievement when, in 1887, he persuaded the explorer Henry Morton Stanley to let him join the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. By the time of his death seven years later, Parke was one of the best known Irishmen of his day; hailed

variously as "the man who saved Stanley" and "the first Irishman to cross Africa".

Although the reputation of Stanley and other members of the expedition was soon tarnished by stories of atrocities and incompetence, Parke's remained relatively intact. He had stood aside from the mud-slinging which had broken out between members of the expedition, and had attempted to dampen the controversy through the publication of an anodyne account of his experiences in equatorial Africa, which also did much to restore Stanley's reputation.

In this fascinating if disturbing biography of Parke, Dr Lyons presents a quite different account of Parke's journey into the "Heart of Darkness", based on the young surgeon's unexpurgated letters and diaries. Lyons recreates the journey in all its horror. Stanley emerges as a far less attractive figure than in Parke's memoirs: vain, imperious and ruthless. Other members of the expedition are also portrayed in a less than flattering light, such as Major Barttelot, whose temper and penchant for violence earned him the name *Kappapo* (whirlwind) among the African bearers. Indeed, Parke's diaries may be read as a sorry catalogue of a descent in barbarism. As the expedition loots and murders its way up the Congo, we encounter cannibalistic tribesmen and slave traders but also, refreshingly, Roger Casement, who was later to expose the appalling condition of native labourers in the Belgian Congo. But the story of Parke's journey is also at times an amusing one, particularly the depiction of the menacing yet preposterous ex-slaver Tippu Tib, who accompanied Stanley through the jungle with his harem of thirty-five women.

Parke comes out of all this fairly well. While some of his fellow officers took a delight in the scenes of barbarism which surrounded them (one even drew pictures of a "cannibalistic" ceremony) or beat the African bearers mercilessly, Parke was more judicious and sympathetic. Although he meted out several beatings of his own, he intervened on other occasions to prevent acts of violence, and appears to have tended to the sick and wounded of all races with equal diligence.