

## Book Reviews

Magda Whitrow emphasizes Wagner's other significant contribution to medicine. He discovered that cretinism was caused by malfunction of the thyroid gland. Why is he not given the credit for this discovery? Whitrow carefully shows that it was because Kocher, the man usually cited as the originator of this theory, published his version in a more prestigious journal. Indeed this raises the question: why is Wagner-Jauregg not better known today? Few psychiatrists can have contributed as much as he did in his eighty-three years. Born within a year of the three psychiatric luminaries Freud, Kraepelin and Bleuler, yet he is now virtually unheard of. Whitrow hints that his personality was not conducive to making a name for himself and that his ideas are now taken for granted as part of Austrian law.

Whitrow manages to give us an impressive amount of detail on Wagner's career and one is struck by other paradoxes. Here was a man whose juniors were devoted to him, but he seemed to have few close friends. He was objective about his work but married an ex-patient of his and regretted it for the rest of his life. He was dedicated to the alleviation of suffering—he spent his free time every Sunday trudging up the Austrian Alps seeking out cretinous children to give thyroid tablets to; he did not see private patients; he gave faradism to himself before administering it to patients; Whitrow rightly claims that his greatest achievement was to counter the widespread therapeutic nihilism. Yet he embraced the theory of eugenics and he became a member of the Nazi party. Whitrow wisely eschews a psychological approach to Wagner-Jauregg's biography. This is not her background and she leaves such matters to some future writer.

Her work is notable for its unearthing and impressive marshalling of original material, out of which she has written a coherent and highly accurate account—there are no misprints and the occasional errors are ones of style and not of medical or historical fact. It is to be recommended. Magda Whitrow has filled a gap in psychiatric historiography and provided us with a scholarly biography of a great psychiatrist.

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DAVID CAHAN, (ed.), *Letters of Hermann von Helmholtz to his parents 1837–1846, Boethius*, vol. 31, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 1993, pp. x, 133, illus., DM 68.00 (3-515-06225-4).

Following the edition by Richard L. Kremer of *Letters of Hermann von Helmholtz to his wife 1847–1859* (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 1990), our sparse knowledge of the previous decade of Helmholtz's life, when he was a medical student in Berlin, is now enriched by Cahan's meticulous transcription of forty-three letters to his parents at Potsdam. This interesting one-way correspondence was discovered by Cahan in the Siemens Museum in Munich, Helmholtz's daughter Anna, by his second marriage, having married Arnold von Siemens. Although the letters were used by Helmholtz's first biographer, Leo Koenigsberger, Cahan restores the full texts where Koenigsberger truncated or edited his selection of quotations. Cahan transcribes the letters from *deutsche Schrift* and annotates them with detailed footnotes which themselves alone provide a rich social history of the period.

In contrast to the rather stern physiologist, physicist, philosopher of science and director of Germany's research efforts of later life, we here meet with a warm and loving son and brother. Although Helmholtz's father, a schoolteacher at the Potsdam Gymnasium, was not wealthy, Helmholtz was able to lead a comfortable life as a student at the military medical school, the Friedrich-Wilhelms Institut. Indeed, family connections appear to have counted for more than his brilliant scholarship in gaining Helmholtz entry to the Institut in 1837. The medical training he received was far from the Humboldtian vision of *Lernfreiheit*, consisting of a gruelling schedule of classes from 7.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. for four years, during which time he somehow managed to continue a full social and cultural life. Following a doctoral dissertation in 1842, Helmholtz worked the wards of the Charité for a year, finding time there to begin work on the phenomenon of fermentation that was to lead him to an anti-vitalist position. When on leave to prepare for the Staatsexamen in the autumn of 1845, he joined the young turks who had gathered around Heinrich Magnus to form the Berlin Physikalische Gesellschaft. It was to this body that, now a qualified doctor, he read the important paper on force in 1847. In effect, this announced his decision to practise physics rather than medicine.

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Both Helmholtz's letters and Cahan's editorial matter provide a rich portrait of medical training in Berlin in the 1840s, and Cahan makes a good case that familiarity with Helmholtz's medical training and extraordinary social life in Berlin is crucial for a proper understanding of the breadth of later interests and accomplishments.

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MICHAEL HAGNER and BETTINA WAHRING-SCHMIDT (eds), *Johannes Müller und die Philosophie*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1992, pp. 341, DM 88.00 (3-05-002232-9).

Johannes Müller (1801–1858) is often referred to as the “father” of modern German physiology. His education and subsequent career coincided with the period during which the natural sciences were gradually emancipated from the “Queen of the sciences”—philosophy. Müller's inaugural address at Bonn University in 1824, ‘Vom Bedürfnis der Physiologie nach einer philosophischen Naturbetrachtung’ (‘On physiology's need for a philosophical contemplation of nature’) provoked great interest at the time and remains a central source of reference for this present volume.

None of the authors here accepts Du Bois Reymond's thesis that Müller's work can be divided into earlier “romantic” phases followed by a more or less distinct empirical one. Rather, they argue, throughout his career, Müller assimilated various philosophical strands into his scientific work, with Schelling, Rudolphi and Goethe as successive influences. Several of the authors—Wahring-Schmidt, Mazzolini, and Hagner—examine Müller's relationship to Kant, Spinoza and other philosophers. Müller's Kantian language has long been appreciated; Hagner further suggests that Spinoza's writings help shape Müller's research on sensory physiology and provided a formula for his moral and ethical aspirations. However, the essays in this volume go beyond mere issues of “influence” to suggest that Müller's employment of philosophy was strongly affected by his desire to give physiology a stable scientific foundation.

More generally, these essays remind us that attitudes towards *Naturphilosophie* have changed over time. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the movement was simply castigated by those who disapproved of all philosophy within science. As Lammel points out, however, critics of *Naturphilosophie* had their own, positivistic philosophical agenda. The old metaphysics was simply replaced by a new one. In his afterword Peter McLaughlin wonders whether:

the use of the image of *Naturphilosophie* during the second half of the nineteenth century to discredit philosophy and to separate the natural sciences strictly from philosophy, is perhaps more related to the failure of the 1848 Revolution than to a presumed negative influence of philosophy on science.

The editors of this volume disclaim any unified thesis about Müller and his relationship to philosophy. The essays do amply demonstrate that philosophy was a lifelong preoccupation for him and that we cannot understand his science without taking this fact seriously.

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