

Book Reviews

Water, as portrayed in Goubert's study, strikes me as a quintessential Latourian non-human actor, which was "conquered" and transformed by architects, town planners, engineers, hygienists, physicians, and chemists, but which also made its own "conquest", dramatically changing the scientific and cultural landscape of nineteenth- and twentieth-century France. Thus, Goubert argues that a cultural and scientific revolution reconceptualized water and its uses, and water—objectified, democratized, medicalized, industrialized, and commercialized—changed people's lifestyles and ways of thinking. Water and its promoters brought about a revolution in *mentalités*, and the environment underwent profound changes with the new sociosanitary infrastructure of post-Pasteurian, Third Republic France.

This innovative and imaginative book, amply illustrated with marvellous examples of "water culture", will be welcomed by historians of medicine and public health and historians of modern France who seek novel, interdisciplinary ways to study health and disease in history. As an excellent example of *histoire des mentalités*, Goubert's work joins studies in the same genre such as Alain Corbin's *Le Miasme et la jonquille: L'odorat et l'imaginaire social* (1982), Georges Vigarello's *Le Propre et le sale. L'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Age* (1985), and Guy Thuillier's *Pour une histoire du quotidien au XIXe siècle en Nivernais* (1977) in enriching our understanding of sociocultural history: habits, attitudes, prejudices, and values and their relationship to health and disease.

Ann F. La Berge, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

ARTHUR WROBEL (ed.), *Pseudo-science and society in nineteenth-century America*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1987, 8vo, pp. 245, illus., \$24.00.

This collection illustrates the difficulties intellectual historians can face in examining unorthodox science. Several of these studies of sectarian science in nineteenth-century America look closely at prominent sectarian thinkers. Arthur Wrobel's fine analysis, for example, convincingly explains why many intellectuals were drawn to phrenology as a mirror of political and religious impulses in American life. In an essay full of insight, Robert W. Delp traces the complex relationship between sectarian science, popular audiences, and middle-class intellectuals, showing that the advocates of spiritualism who turned to the popular lecture circuit were attacked by such intellectuals as the philosopher and lecturer Andrew Jackson Davis for offering the public entertainment rather than enlightenment.

Despite a professed interest in the popular appeal of sectarian science, however, this collection seldom looks hard at the public mind and behaviour, which have attracted sophisticated attention in recent historiography. Marshall Scott Legan's outline of the familiar story of hydropathy misses the voices of patients and advocates, especially women, whom Susan Cayleff and Jane Donegan have shown played a critical part in promoting this medical alternative. Harold Aspiz's study of sexual reformers relies heavily on prescriptive literature, leaving unexplored the question of how these texts were read. John L. Greenaway's study of the fervent public interest in electrotherapy is particularly disappointing. Americans who brought Dr Scott's Electric Hair-Brush or the Harness's Electric Corsets were, he suggests, unhappy with their physicians' inadequate and unscientific treatments. But this argument does not fit well with the recent work of Charles Rosenberg and John Harley Warner, who have shown that physicians and many patients shared the medical belief system that made orthodox therapies efficacious.

The use by the editor of the awkward term "pseudo-science" reinforces the contributors' vague and shifting notions of the relationship between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. Taylor Stoehrer finds mesmerism attracted those who rejected the reductionism of orthodox science; Greenaway, on the other hand, argues that physicians were attracted by electrotherapy's association with mainstream physiology and the experimentalist programme of Claude Bernard. Sectarians, clearly, were sometimes on the fringe of orthodox science, and sometimes at its heart. A number of these authors are uneasy about the pragmatic and anti-intellectual

Book Reviews

strains of nineteenth-century sectarian science. Although critical of orthodox science in this period, nonetheless they have implicitly drawn a model from late twentieth-century science—as a detached, professionalized undertaking—that was neither feasible nor relevant in this context. Most sectarians were practitioners rather than intellectual system-builders, and many sought fame, fortune and a popular audience. But this hardly stigmatizes them as charlatans, for as historians have recently stressed, scientifically-inclined Americans in the nineteenth century had to be first and foremost practitioners. Even the spiritualist philosopher Davis became a private practitioner (to earn his living), using his clairvoyant powers to heal patients.

The essays fall short of explaining these sects' decline, although Wrobel, in an unfortunate phrase, suggests that sectarian sciences "paved the road for the triumphant march" of orthodox science (p. 224). For most of these authors 1890 is a watershed. Yet surely the interest in science popularizers has hardly faded: what of the rise of New Age Medicine, occult groups, and holistic healing? Readers are left to wonder how and why many orthodox scientists came to reject sectarian principles and practices, and how the enduring fringes of science have been defined and maintained.

Naomi Rogers, University of Alabama

MIRKO D. GRMEK, *Histoire du Sida: début et origine d'une pandémie actuelle*, Médecine et sociétés, Paris, Payot, 1989, pp. 393, illus., Fr. 98.00 (paperback).

History teaches the present to learn from the past. Historians make bad prophets. These two aphorisms—*prima facie* contradictory but, rightly juxtaposed, the soul of historiographical wisdom—set the intellectual parameters for Professor Grmek's admirable account of what he felicitously calls "la première des pestilences postmodernes". The narrative Grmek tells of the early years of the epidemic in the United States and Western Europe is by-and-large familiar enough to English-speaking audiences, starting with the presentation of mysterious complaints amongst Los Angeles homosexuals in 1979, and going up to the "compromis politique" whereby, since 1987, the rival American and French claims to priority in the discovery of the AIDS virus have been smoothed out (cynics would say because Gallo and Montagnier both recognized that the award of a Nobel Prize would necessarily be *joint*). On the American experience, Grmek has culled many of his details from Randy Shilts's *And the band played on. Politics, people and the AIDS epidemic* (1987). Mercifully we are spared Shilts's journalistic colouring, and Grmek spices his text with a mordant Gallic wit—deploring, for instance, the Anglo-Saxon linguistic clumsiness of the acronym AIDS ("les deux consonnes finales ne sont pas euphoniques").

What makes this by far the best historical overview of AIDS to date is, of course, Grmek's panoramic grasp of the history of epidemics from palaeolithic times onwards. His text is particularly strong in assessing alternative answers to the questions of the dissemination of AIDS (though undiagnosed at the time) before the late 1970s. In guardedly endorsing the historical evidence for the growing epidemic nature of AIDS in Central Africa from the mid-twentieth century, Grmek exposes the parochialism of all those who have identified AIDS as a "gay plague". In global terms, and in the long haul, the association of AIDS with homosexual sub-cultures may turn out to have been little more than a peripheral—though highly visible—event in the history of the disease.

Historical epidemiology is Grmek's strength. One would, however, have liked further analysis of the economic disruption, especially in Africa, which AIDS will probably wreak. To judge from the density of references to socio-economic, no less than medical, catastrophe in many of the essays dealing with the Third World in the valuable compendium *The global impact of AIDS* (ed. Alan Fleming and others, 1988), this is a problem already deeply troubling the world health community. Historians who have re-examined histories of epidemics in the light of AIDS have been too apt to neglect the economic dimension (an exception, however, is Guenter Risse's essay in Elizabeth Fee and Daniel Fox's 1988 collection, *AIDS. The burden of history*).