

Book Reviews

MARGARET ROWBOTTOM and CHARLES SUSSKIND, *Electricity and medicine. History of their interaction*, San Francisco, San Francisco Press; London, Macmillan, 1984, 8vo, pp. vii, 303, illus., £25.00.

Considering the use that doctors and other healers have made of electricity, both in practice and in theory, it is surprising how little attention the subject has received from historians. There is ample space for a monograph on Enlightenment medicine and electrical therapy, as well as one on electricity and theories of health and disease in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century offers further scope; theory and therapy again, and also new areas such as electrophysiology and electrosurgery. By the twentieth century, the field has become boundless, including all the former categories plus electroencephalography, electrocardiography, electromyography, and so forth. Margaret Rowbottom and Charles Susskind have chosen to survey this whole territory from William Gilbert to C.T. Scanners. They have performed an invaluable task, for it is one which most historians would find daunting. Not only have they accomplished it, they have done it extremely well. This is straightforward, blow-by-blow factual stuff of the best sort. The authors survey a great deal of eighteenth-century literature, both therapeutic and theoretical; they describe it but, I am glad to say, they are not given to long interpretive pauses. Margaret Rowbottom was employed for many years in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum. Her expertise is evident in the large number of useful illustrations of historical objects that decorate this volume. Charles Susskind has previously published widely on modern electrical technology. Presumably, his expertise accounts for the quite technical approach to late nineteenth- and twentieth-century material. Here the volume takes under its wing not only obviously electrical areas but also X-rays, radioactivity, and ultraviolet light. Although the authors do not draw any historical conclusion from their evidence, their volume is a reminder of the massive commercial investment in electrotherapy during the first fifty years of this century. That is another subject which would certainly pay dividends to the historian. The book is a goldmine of little-known literature, but unfortunately has only a biographical and not a subject index. Its other shortcoming is, of course, the price of comprehensiveness; the authors have left a lot of room for further research. If the possibility of a second edition arises, the authors might consider a bibliographical essay on the sources for their subject.

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GERLOF VERWEY, *Psychiatry in an anthropological and biomedical context: Philosophical presuppositions and implications of German psychiatry, 1820–1870*. Dordrecht, Boston, and Lancaster, D. Reidel, 1984, 8vo, pp. xix, 316, £30.50.

Twentieth-century clinical and biomedical psychiatry traces its roots to nineteenth-century German university medicine; it is therefore perhaps ironic that this history remains essentially obscure. As one would expect, there is a German-language tradition of commentary, but this focuses on the consequences of taken-for-granted shifts into physicalist theory and university settings (both associated with Griesinger), as well as a continuity of clinical categories. Verwey's book brings a new clarity and precision to the historiography. It has an exact historical purpose: to describe the philosophical self-conception of German psychiatry in two modes—"as an anthropological discipline and as a natural science"—from about 1820 to 1870. This is certainly a valid historical purpose when, as Verwey very clearly does, it excludes anachronistic rational judgements; further, given the self-consciousness of presupposition and theory in German academic culture, it is a necessary purpose and prerequisite for future, broader histories of psychiatry which may seek to describe its social and medical character.

Verwey characterizes two broad philosophical attitudes in psychiatry, the anthropological and the biomedical. The former, working within a tradition stamped with Kant's authority, sought a psychology treating man as whole, as body and soul in actual and conceptual union. The separation of the anthropological psychiatrists into psychists and somaticists (represented