

Book Reviews

The remaining essays were all newly commissioned. Gerald Izenberg provides a balanced and readable account of the abandonment of the seduction theory (taking into consideration the newest discussions on this topic). Clark Glymour's piece reflects on Freud's relationship to nineteenth-century philosophy (including Franz Brentano) and neurology in terms of Freud's understanding of the mechanism of the nervous system. James Hopkins provides a solid, well balanced introduction to the *Interpretation of Dreams*. Sebastian Gardner limits his discussion of Freud's understanding of the unconscious within the specific discourse of psychoanalysis. Here some attention to the older discussion of the pre-history of the unconscious would have been in order. Bennett Simon and Rachel B. Blass introduce the Oedipus complex with all of the contemporary critiques, a theme echoed with sensitivity and depth in Nancy Chodorow's chapter on Freud's understanding of women. Jennifer Church raises the question of ethics and the problem of radical relativism often lobbed at Freud. The final two chapters, by Robert Paul and John Deigh, supply a balanced introduction to Freud's reading of culture.

As can be seen from this litany of material, this is a volume which can (and I suspect is) being used to provide the deep background for readings of Freud. With Freud now firmly among the philosophers, one hopes that further volumes in this series might address other such figures. A volume on Klein or Winnicott would seem appropriate. Here, too, a readership is present and a corpus which is complex enough to provide a focus for interested minds.

Jerome Neu and Cambridge University Press are to be complimented. They have given the reader a useful, well written (and well edited) volume which provides a relatively inexpensive supplement for student and teacher alike.

Sander L. Gilman, Cornell University

K. VAN BERKEL, M. J. VAN LIEBERG, H. A. M. SNELDERS, *Spiegelbeeld der Wetenschap. Het Genootschap ter Bevordering van Natuur-, Genees- en Heekunde 1790–1990* [The Reflection of Science. The Society for the Advancement of Natural Science, Medicine and Surgery, 1790–1990], Nieuwe Nederlandse Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde en der Natuurwetenschappen No. 40, Rotterdam, Erasmus Publishing, 1991, pp. 184, illus., NLG 79.50, \$45.00 (hardback, 90–5235–023–X), NLG 59.50, \$35.00 (paperback, 90–5235–022–1).

In 1990 the Amsterdam Society for the Advancement of Science celebrated its 200th birthday, and this is the book commissioned by the Society to commemorate the occasion. Much of it—about two-thirds—is an account of the activities of the Society in some detail, and this provides an appropriate revision and extension of previous commemorative volumes issued in 1915 and 1965. But the book is more ambitious than this: it attempts to use the history of the Society as a route into the history of science in general, and of Dutch science in particular: hence the title, *The reflection of science*.

The day-to-day history of the Society is handled in two substantial sections by van Lieberg (1790–1890) and Snelders (1870–1990); Klaas van Berkel provides the large introductory section, which seeks to clarify the overall development of the Society by examining its view of science and of its own tasks within science. The aims and work of the Society have changed enormously over the last two centuries, as has science itself. For some of the period at least, claims van Berkel, the fortunes of the Society reflect those of science in general. It started as an Amsterdam club for surgeons, concerned to elevate the trade of surgery to an academic discipline: the local surgeons' guild was kept very much at arm's length. The methods employed were the ones common to most eighteenth-century Enlightenment-generated societies: essay competitions, and the publication of the Society's deliberations. By the twentieth century, things had changed: essays had been abandoned, though lectures, demonstrations and publications continued, and the Society now actively subsidized research, travel and even professorships. It was no longer concerned exclusively with medicine, but embraced all subjects, especially the natural sciences. What had happened, and how did the Society deal with the changes?

The main change was, says van Berkel, the increasing influence of the natural sciences on the medical world, so that, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, doctors and surgeons had

Book Reviews

come to have an almost mechanical view of the world based on physics and chemistry, and later on biology. The period 1870–1910 was the Society's hey-day: it embraced these changes wholeheartedly, set up new sections, took on new members, grew to be a national institution, shared in the economic revival of the Netherlands and of Amsterdam in particular, and was a true reflection of science at large in the Netherlands, which produced a good handful of Nobel prizewinners and could hold its head up internationally, even if not at the very top levels. In the twentieth century, however, the expansion and fragmentation of science proceeded too rapidly for the Society to maintain any claims to stewardship. Through a series of reorganizations, by the 1950s the Society had become a merely titular umbrella-organization linking a federalized set of independent disciplines. The unity of science was lost, and the Society reflected that too.

All this is accompanied by some incidental illustrations, an index, and full set of references. This attempt to make a straightforward commemorative publication rather more universal in scope is commendable, and generally succeeds in its aims without too much stretching of the material, or of the image of "reflection".

Michael Wintle, University of Hull

MARGARET PELLING and RICHARD M. SMITH (eds), *Life, death, and the elderly: historical perspectives, Studies in the Social History of Medicine*, London and New York, Routledge, 1991, pp. xvi, 252, £45.00 (0-415-05742-6).

The introduction to these essays provides an invaluable critical survey of historical writing on definitions of old age since ancient times, on the health of the elderly and its treatment, on their family and household relationships, the limited role of institutions, work and retirement. Smith analyses the retirement contracts whereby some ageing property-holders in late medieval England attempted to ensure security for their final years. Pelling uses a unique census of the poor in sixteenth-century Norwich for some original observations of the expedients whereby older people survived, emphasizing the greater importance of work, for as long as it was physically possible, and of re-marriage to a younger and/or fitter spouse than of poor relief or of extensive support from equally impoverished families, even where they existed. Wright explores similar themes for the majority female town of Ludlow in the eighteenth century.

Von Kondratowicz interestingly surveys the conceptualization of old age in German medical dictionaries and encyclopaedias from the late eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, though he seems sometimes insufficiently aware of the very long history of some of the ideas he discusses. Charles Webster contributes an essentially gloomy assessment of the fate of the elderly in the first decade of the National Health Service.

David Thompson emphasizes the very long history in Britain of public responsibility for the elderly (through the Poor Law and more recent forms of welfare services) and the equally long absence of an expectation that the family should be central to their care. This is marred by a tiresome tone of embittered polemic. His assault on the supposed unrepentent "Whiggishness" of "welfare historians" is far removed from what serious historians have been writing for quite some time, as his lack of reference to actual examples suggests. His statement that "The accepted view of the Victorian Poor Law is that in all times and in all places it was harsh and miserly, vindictive and authoritarian" is bizarre, as a glance at the most widely used textbooks will indicate (e.g. M. E. Rose, *The relief of poverty 1834–1914*, 1972, 2nd edn, 1986 and M. A. Crowther, *The workhouse system, 1834–1929*, 1981). In his determination to destroy a supposed consensus (which exists on a popular but not on a scholarly level) that in "the past" families really cared for their old folk, Thompson is less measured than his editors, who comment that, "It would be prudent for historians to regard community-funded and family-provided support as complementary rather than as alternative modes of assistance".

Mead Cain concludes with an interesting study of what happens when the family is, indeed, the only expected source of support for the elderly (not much good for the poor especially if childless) based on small rural samples in present day India and Bangladesh.

This is a valuable volume above all for warning us against seeing neat patterns or simple trajectories in the past.

Pat Thane, Goldsmiths' College, University of London