debate on the priority of public versus private interests in cases where doctors were asked to give evidence in court. A good example of the way in which the doctor’s duties to the general public ought to carry more weight than his duty to the individual patient and to confidentiality is the debate on the combat of venereal diseases in Imperial Germany, culminating in the decision of the Supreme Court in 1905.

One of the most fascinating and illuminating chapters in this book is that dealing with patients’ information and the right to self-determination. Germany can certainly be considered a pioneering state in this respect. In 1894, the German Supreme Court endorsed the legal view that medical interventions constituted physical injuries. This meant that any operation (except in medical emergencies) required the patient’s consent.

The fourth chapter deals with the ethical views that were expressed in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writings about doctors’ duties, considering especially the issues of truth-telling, euthanasia and abortion. The main focus lies on Albert Moll’s seminal book on medical ethics, published in 1902.

Maehle’s conclusion is convincing, although it does not come as a surprise for those who are familiar with the medical history of this period. Medical ethics in Imperial Germany were guided more by political considerations, notions of honour, and professional reputation than by any concern for patients’ interests.

Robert Jütte,
Institute for the History of Medicine of the Robert Bosch Foundation


Popular perceptions of vegetarianism often stipulate that its attractiveness as a dietary choice is essentially a recent phenomenon, with its recognition being mostly stimulated by the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. Yet, as James Gregory rightly stresses, the complex interrelationships between abstinence from meat and modernity date much further back, especially in the British context. Gregory insists that the significance of the role in British vegetarian ideals and its organized activities throughout the nineteenth century was striking, paving the way for a movement that would ultimately attract thousands worldwide. Accordingly, one of the primary arguments of this book is that vegetarianism has not played such a marginal historical role as might be expected.

From the 1840s onwards, a well organized national network of meat abstainers developed whose members were often highly vocal in persuading the community at large to join their cause, promoting what they perceived to be the ethical, hygienic, moral and aesthetic benefits of a meat-free life. Notably, the Vegetarian Society formed branches throughout Britain and Ireland, organized campaign meetings, banquets and published a sophisticated series of publications, newspapers and pamphlets. Vegetarianism ultimately developed into a very vocal movement, attracting serious responses from various sectors of the community. This might take the form of the incorporation of vegetarian recipes in cookery books, support from scientific men and prominent adherents such as George Bernard Shaw and Annie Besant.

Yet Gregory is careful not to overplay the movement’s relevance. Certainly, the form of vegetarianism presented here is one that was never going to win over the public to a significant degree. In particular, the failure of the movement to attract much working-class support is noted. However, it is portrayed as holding a more successful function in helping to shape public education on dietary matters, a role that was not insignificant given the period’s obsession with issues such as food adulteration, digestion and food provision. It can also be seen to have provoked debate on
such questions as the importance of non-animal foods, the relationship between man and animal, and controversies related to animal cruelty even amongst non-adherents. Crucially, it was a movement with much to say on the subject of women, not least because it appealed to female sensibilities. It was also self-consciously associated with teetotalism, utopianism and spiritualism. Ultimately, this allows us to perceive the movement as one which formed part of wide concerns rather than being solely a fringe issue. As Gregory successfully shows, this enables a far broader view of British Victorian society and the numerous social movements that emerged.

Gregory skilfully explores the phenomenon as a movement as well as a lived experience. Whilst the movement’s organization is explored in substantial depth, his most interesting chapter analyses vegetarian practice. Within this, we hear of the socialist Samuel Bower living on grey peas alone whilst the large, public vegetarian banquet is explored as part of an attempt to counter popular opinion that condemned the diet as austere and unpleasant. Vegetarian restaurants are analysed, and it is with surprise that we learn of their growth in cities such as London. Gregory’s analysis of cultural representations of the vegetarian is based upon a vast array of sources exploring the movement’s connection to the literary world. He examines the treatment of the movement in newspapers and journals, outlines its presence in works by ethnologists, anthropologists and philosophers, and discusses the presentation of vegetarian characters in prose fiction and poetry. Overall, this is an important addition to the heavily neglected area of Victorian attitudes towards food, diet and digestion.

Ian Miller,
University College, Dublin

Peter Cryle and Christopher E Forth, (eds), Sexuality at the fin de siècle: the making of a “central problem”, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2008, pp. 201, illus., £42.50, $50.00 (hardback 9788-0-87413-037-9).

This volume takes as its agenda not the posited fundamental change in understanding sexuality during the later nineteenth century, but an attempt to understand the actual place of sexuality within culture and society at that time. The contributors shift the focus from the usual interest in the developing discourses around homosexuality and female hysteria, and the social anxieties around prostitution, reproduction, obscenity, and sexually transmitted diseases, to reveal a swirling penumbra of other concerns also related to the realm of the sexual which suggest the instability involved in endeavours to establish sexuality as the “central problem” and to define its terms, both at the period in question, and in more recent historiographical analyses.

A case is made for sexuality at the fin de siècle having been more manifest and visible, at least in the cases of certain kinds of bodies undergoing certain kinds of scrutiny, than the prevalent discourse of concealment/uncovering/definition would indicate. Several of these essays locate sexuality and its anomalies and problems within the arena of performance or spectacle, concurrent with and even overlapping the new medico-scientific view of “freakish” differences. Other essays usefully indicate the extent to which new modes of understanding anomaly and difference were being ventilated in non-elite forms such as the French middle-brow novel, as well as deployed in the popular culture venues of cabarets and sideshows.

In the first part—‘Displaying and examining the sexual body’—Elizabeth Stephens examines nineteenth-century anatomical museums, a phenomenon widespread through Europe and North America exploiting curiosity about forbidden bodily knowledge and anomalous or freakish bodies, arguing for a porosity of influence between these increasingly stigmatized institutions and the investigations of the medical establishment. Stephens cites the