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Book Reviews and Notices

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Reviews and Notices of Omodeo, Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance: Reception, Legacy, Transformation*, Brill 2014; Gentilcore,* Food and Health in Early Modern Europe: Diet, Medicine and Society, 1450-1800*, Bloomsbury 2015; Whatmore,* What is Intellectual History?*, Polity 2016; Apel,* Feverish Bodies, Enlightened Minds: Science and the Yellow Fever Controversy in the Early American Republic*, Stanford UP 2016; Hill Collins and Bilge,* Intersectionality*, Polity 2016; Weeks,* What is Sexual History?*, Polity 2016.*

1 Pietro Daniel Omodeo, *Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance: Reception, Legacy, Transformation*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, p. xiv+434. ISBN 9789004251786, €159,00.

Copernicus occupies a place of privilege in modern history of science. Alexandre Koyré made his astronomy the instigator of the Scientific Revolution. And before Thomas Kuhn wrote about scientific revolutions in the plural, he wrote about the Copernican Revolution in the singular. The Copernican Revolution, said Kuhn, was in its scientific impact like other important theories and unlike most of them in its effects outside of scientific communities. In its wider social consequences, he noted, it compared to the revolutions of Darwin, Freud and Einstein.[1] But Copernicus the individual was *less* important to his revolution

[1] Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), 4.

than those three to theirs. Copernicus died the same year as the publication of *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543). Rheticus, his one disciple, wrote a treatise called the *Narratio prima* (1540) with ideas that are not found in the *De revolutionibus*, but we do not know if they were his ideas or his master's. The Copernican Revolution, as both Koyré and Kuhn recognized, is very much a story of reception. Over the last fifty years, a formidable body of historical work has emerged on Copernicus, his adopters and critics. A recent tome by Robert Westman and the critical storm it generated show that Copernicus and his reception remain relevant not only as historical subjects but also as subjects who can make us question how history of science should be practiced.[1]

Pietro Daniel Omodeo's new book, *Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance: Reception, Legacy, Transformation*, is a welcome addition to the literature. It is a book that we have long needed, particularly as a concentrated response to Pierre Duhem's *Sauver les apparences*, a slim volume from 1908 that continues to exert great influence over how we read Renaissance astronomy and celestial philosophy. Astronomy from the Greeks until Newton was, for Duhem, marked by extreme tension between those who considered astronomical hypotheses as predictive instruments and those who thought they had to represent physical reality. The former camp was in the right, according to Duhem; the latter camp was deluded but sometimes useful for how it pushed fundamental science forward. In Duhem's narrative, Copernicus was a realist under the spell of Averroists centered at the University of Padua.

> Copernic conçoit le problème astronomique comme le conçoivent les physiciens italiens dont il a été l'auditeur ou le condisciple ; ce problème consiste à sauver les apparences au moyen d'hypothèses conformes aux principes de la Physique. […].[2]

Duhem's approach has been qualified and modified over the intervening century, yet it has proven extremely fruitful. It remains the major historiographical filter among historians of Renaissance astronomy. I would suggest that Omodeo's book demonstrates for once and all that pure instrumentalism never existed among astronomers. Everybody had some dog in the race. An accurate

[1] Robert S. Westman, *The Copernican Question: Prognostication, Skepticism, and Celestial Order* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011). For the ensuing debate between Westman, Noel Swerdlow, and John Heilbron, see *Perspectives on Science* 20, no. 3, and 21, no. 1.

[2] Pierre Duhem, *Sauver Les Apparences* (Paris: Vrin, 2004 [1908]), 21.

historiography of the Copernican reception should, instead, consider priorities. What were the physical and mathematical priorities of astronomers and philosophers responding to or adopting Copernicus? When and how did they invoke what we might now call instrumentalism? What was the relation between those priorities and wider questions about the capacities and limits of human reason? Omodeo's work is not the first to recognize that sixteenth century astronomers were essentially "frustrated realists" in the words of Barker and Goldstein.[1] However, it is a comprehensive and systematic answer to the above questions as they relate to Copernican astronomy.

Omodeo considers a rich selection of actors in a variety of contexts, and he moves from actor to actor with precision and verve, keeping his chapters thematically focused. One of the most attractive features of his book is that it covers a wide geographical range: Germany, France, Italy, and England receive the most attention. Omodeo is chiefly concerned with how Copernican sympathizers justified themselves and with how their antagonists set boundaries on astronomy. One of the book's virtues is to ask what practically minded astronomers thought about the status of astronomical knowledge. For instance, chapter three looks at how ephemerists used Copernican astronomy and what they had to say about the nature of astronomical knowledge. Omodeo is an expert on Lutheran mathematical networks. Another highlight of his study is its clear overview of the Lutheran "Wittenberg interpretation" of Copernicus, which reworked Copernican techniques in a geocentric framework. If there is one personage who stands out in Omodeo's study, and who stands apart, it is Giordano Bruno. Once again, Bruno comes across as perhaps the most vital, audacious and creative of sixteenth century philosophers. Omodeo is to be commended for his fascinating treatment of the Nolan, which shows to what extent Bruno's anti-Christian views of truth and goodness link up with his cosmological beliefs. Cardinal Bellarmine, who directed Bruno's inquisition and was a hero of Duhem's *Sauver les apparances*, emerges as a facile thinker, offering nothing of substance to astronomers and philosophers except an injunction to hew close enough to Vatican doctrine.

Copernicus in the Cultural Debates of the Renaissance will prove a highly use-

[1] Peter Barker and Bernard R. Goldstein, "Realism and Instrumentalism in Sixteenth Century Astronomy: A Reappraisal," *Perspectives on Science* 6, no. 3 (1998): 232–58, 253.

ful study for scholars working in sixteenth century astronomy and natural philosophy. They will discover new actors and thematic connections. Because of its scope, clarity and comprehensiveness, Omodeo's volume will also pay dividends to graduate students, and to historians of science working on outside subjects, who wish to understand the epistemological stakes of astronomy in the sixteenth century.

Jonathan Regier

2 David Gentilcore, *Food and Health in Early Modern Europe: Diet, Medicine and Society, 1450-1800*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 264. ISBN 1472528891, £ 14.29 (eBook). ISBN 9781472534972, £ 25.99 (paperback).

Both individuals and states seem to be afflicted by food anxieties. This modern obsession with diet reflects the link that, since Hippocrates's time, men have established between food and health, asking the following questions: what is food? What does food produce in the body? How does the stomach function? What influence does diet have on the expression of one's own ability? In *Food and Health in Early Modern Europe* David Gentilcore traces the history of this link, investigating the medical theories and the social and cultural factors that gradually led to a definition of foods as being healthy or not.

The interdisciplinary approach is intriguing. Dealing with the question of nutritive values, Gentilcore draws together two strands: the history of food, wherein interest has shifted from the 1960s to the present day from food production and consumption to the cultural, religious and politics aspects of it; together with the history of medicine, the study of which has seen a stunning increase in popularity over the last thirty years. Gentilcore, however, does not limit himself to examining the general connections between food and medical theories. Instead, he follows the path sketched by the historian Andrew Wear, who, in *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine*[1], reserves a whole chapter to preventive medicine and the importance of medical counsel. Focusing on food as an element of preventive medicine, the author attempts to put two subdisciplines, the social history of medicine and the study of the learned medical

[1] A. Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

discourse, next to one other, avoiding the gap between the evolution of theory and medical practices that the success of these disciplines has created.

In the first part (chap. 1-2) the author looks at how the question of the healthiness of food, and cooking in a healthy manner, was influenced by medical theories.

In the middle of the Fifteenth Century, the revival of preventive medicine, thanks to the rescue of Galen's *De sanitate tuenda* and *De alimentorum facultatibus*, was characterized by a focus on food and individual constitution. According to the Galenic perspective, both body and food are governed by four fluids, or humours. Since each person is born with a prevalent humour (the so called *complexio* which is predisposed to specific diseases), the maintenance of one's health consists in an accurate diagnosis of the humours and a tailor-made regimen that balances the fluids predominant in the body with the opposite fluids in foods (for example, lettuce, which was not considered a proper food, but just a condiment, was recommended to people of 'hot' complexion). Since the stomach was considered a sort of perpetually boiling pot and digestion a form of cooking ('concoction'), preference was given to those foods that foster the action of the stomach, such as hot and well-cooked foods, or bread, which was considered a sort of glue that aids the digestive process.

Starting from the middle of the Seventeenth Century, more universal physiologies elaborated by Paracelsian and iatromechanical physicians called the idea that everybody is unique into question, and Gentilcore skilfully describes how dietary advice gradually transformed from detailed recommendations to general counsel about prudent and measured consumption. At the same time, new understandings of food and the digestive process gradually shaped new conceptions of diet. Food, in addition to its evermore frequent classification along chemical lines (particularly after the publication of Louis Lémery's *Traité des aliments* in 1775), slowly ceased to be determined by the constitution of the individual and became a question of personal taste. And a new understanding of the action of the stomach, which was now understood to break food up via mechanical processes, ferments or stomach acid, supported the idea of a lighter diet (in 1755, for example, the physician Jacques-Jean Bruhier suggested that fruit and oysters could be eaten raw).

Although the emphasis on preventive medicine had given way to the idea that treatment depended on drug therapies, dietetics didn't suddenly collapse,

and the author shows how its structure remained Galenic, albeit with the language of the fluids replaced by that of chemical constituents and/or mechanical processes. For example, George Cheyne, in his *Essay of Health and Long Life* (1724), was original in defining a healthy body as one in which juices circulate freely through tubes and in prescribing a light diet that avoids obstructions caused by fatty and oily foods. Yet his treatise still holds a traditional structure: it is dedicated to a specific class of people, i.e. educated gentlemen, and focuses on the maintenance of health with regards to the regulation of the six non-naturals (air, motion and rest, sleep and waking, food and drink, excretion, passions).

According to Gentilcore, the substantial change occurred starting from the middle of the Eighteenth Century. At this point there was a resurgence of interest in preventive medicine, but now in a more comprehensive manner, which considered both environmental factors and those aspects of social structure thought to determine health. For example, William Buchan, in *Domestic Medicine* (1769), after defining a healthy body as one which interacts well with the surrounding environment, adds a chapter where he describes how the poor can improve their diet. Meanwhile, in Samuel-Auguste Tissot's *A Treatise on the Diseases Incident to Literary and Sedentary Persons* (1772), the idea of living as close as possible to nature becomes a critique of city luxuries, and an occasion to underline the importance of a natural diet that avoids artificiality.

Since Gentilcore aims to stress the shift in the nature of dietary advice from the middle of the Eighteenth Century, the changes that transformed diet from being a personal concern to a public health issue would have benefited from a more thorough analysis. Even acknowledging the author's view that a medicalization of the society was especially felt during the Enlightenment, and that it was from that period that diets for all ranks of society started to appear, it would have been interesting, for example, to know if the utopian texts of the

Renaissance or the discussion of the health of the body politic among the early members of the Royal Society had had any influence.

In the second part, Gentilcore looks at how food perception and practices were shaped by social factors and how they interacted with medical theories.

Chapter three discusses the ruling elites's inclination to define the eating styles of different social groups. The Galenic assumption that everyone should eat according to his own *complexio* was then used to justify why the delicate constitution of noblemen could not digest those foods considered edible only by the strong, hot stomachs of rustics and manual labourers. This medical idea about class persisted even when chemical and mechanical theories contradicted the Galenic paradigm. As late as 1785, for example, Andrew Harper was still suggesting that substantial meals be offered to poor children, to prevent their stomachs from becoming too delicate.

Chapter four examines the link between food, human nature and nations. The constitution—a term used both in political theory and physiology to describe the make-up of the body and how best to look after it—was, in Galenic tradition, something that determined diet, which in turn, had a strong influence on human nature. This resulted in the formation of national stereotypes, supported by the idea that the foods of one's birth place are best. In 1642 we can read in James Howell's travel guide that the "humour of the people" is "patient and industrious" (p. 88), where the "humour" is now used in a new sense, to indicate people's behaviour. Thus, people's inclinations and personal tastes are now influences over food choices and are seen as reflective of national characteristics. This puts into question the influence of diet in establishing human nature, an influence that, in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), is replaced by the idea of race.

The idea of asceticism, fasting and the religious calendar also influenced food culture (chap. 5). In particular, Protestantism (and, by the sixteenth century, the Counter-Reformation) had deep consequences in terms of attitudes towards luxury and excessive mortification of the flesh. The message about moderation was primarily religious, it was thought to purify the soul, but Gentilcore underlines that it also had a practical medical sense. According to Galen, gluttony does not allow 'concoction' and non-digested food causes physical pain in the body, and fumes that obfuscate the mind. Some radical Protestant groups, such as the Ranters, moralized about meat consumption (chap. 6). The first

vegetable-only dietary advice was probably written by the merchant Thomas Tryon, once an apprentice hatter of an Anabaptist. For him, the path toward spiritual progress consists of religious tolerance, non-violence towards animals and simplicity. Though it may seem radical, Tryon was writing in 1691, when increased fruit and vegetable consumption among the elites had already forced physicians to adapt their advice (which had once looked down on these cold and watery sources of nourishment). As for more vegetable-heavy diets and abstinence, medical doctrines also have a small role in determining the assimilation of the new foods brought into Europe in the Columbia exchange (chap. 7) and in shaping behaviours towards so-called "liquid food" (chap. 8).

While in the first part of the book the conservatism of the regimen comes to light, in the second part another characteristic of dietary advice becomes apparent, i.e. adaptability. This is to be understood in several different ways. It is the adaptability of the author toward his readers (an idea that perhaps should not just be read as the physician's subservience to the evolving behaviours of the elites, but also in terms of a particular kind of relationship, that of physician-patient), but it's also the adaptability of a theory, in our case the Galenic paradigm, to these changes of habits, whether they be habits that are merely a fashion among the elites (such as the luxury of *sorbetti* and wine with ice that soon become a way to delate corrupted humours), or practices influenced by geographical factors (i.e. English authors approved of potato consumption, while physicians in Normandy promoted the benefits of cider).

Considering these undertones, the fact that one's class, constitution and religion were more influential than the new medical theories or the availability of new foods on diets don't just give us the impression that food habits were mainly determined by social factors to which medical discourse simply had to adapt. It also shows that preventive medicine did not seek to determine everyday life from above but to complement habits and suggest correctives of a social and natural kind. This characteristic not only is explained in terms of cultural or social history, but also by bearing in mind some specific features of medical knowledge. Firstly, the importance given to practical effectiveness in defining the success of any given medical doctrine. Secondly, the fact that preventive medicine is the strand where medical knowledge is itself culture and politics, where there is no sharp distinction between religious practice, power rituals and remedies.

On closer inspection, therefore, the angle of observation provided by dietary advice allows us to bring medical practice and theory together, to show the meeting point between different interlocutors (such as learned physicians and those who enlivened courts or salons), and also grants an insight into the meaning of health and the widespread interest in it among the non-medical community (taking for example the extremely successful *Della Vita sobria*, written by the nobleman Alvise Cornano in 1558). The aim of regimens was not merely the absence of illness, or physical well-being, because health was also conceived as the ability to lead a happier, more virtuous life. We may identify this broader understanding of health as a sort of middle ground between medicine and philosophy, one that may help us understand, as Shapiro[1] and Smith[2] have recently done, the nexus between natural and moral philosophy. Even without venturing in that direction, Gentilcore highlights some interesting points, including the past importance of knowing what is good for your body, the idea of being one's own physician and allowing nature to run its course. Elsewhere he muses about how diets were tailored to specific profession such as magistrates or scholars, with the aim of maintaining a clear mind predisposed to virtue (a meaningful example of that tendency is provided by the famous physician and philosopher Guglielmo Grataroli, who wrote: "orderlie diet quickeneth the spirits and reviveth the minde, making it more active and coragious to know and practize vertuous operations", p. 17).

With skillful touch Gentilcore tackles the many themes involved in the dietary questions of the early modern period and shows how these were important facets of the so-called *ars vivendi. Food and Health in Early Modern Europe* bears testimony both to the intricate connection between various disciplines and to the specific nature of the ideas behind early preventive medicine, where moral, social and natural aspects defined the body and the act of nutrition at one and the same time.

Lucia Randone

[1] L. Shapiro, "Descartes on Human Nature and the Human Good", in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. C. Fraenkel, D. Perinetti, J.E.H. Smith (Dordrecht & Boston: Springer, 2010), 13-26.

[2] J.E.H. Smith, "Diet, embodiment, and virtue in the mechanical philosophy", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43, (2012): 338–348.

3 Richard Whatmore, *What is Intellectual History?*, Cambridge, UK - Malden, MA: Polity, 2016, p. 138. ISBN 9780745644929, HC £45.00, PB £14.99.

In *What is Intellectual History?* Richard Whatmore, professor of modern history at the University of St Andrews, presents one particularly influential vision of what intellectual history ought to be. Quoting John Burrow, Whatmore presents the field as recovering "what people in the past meant by the things they said and what these things 'meant' to them" (p. 13). Above everything else, intellectual history attempts to understand past thinkers in their historical contexts. Although the present-day relevance of historical actors' thoughts is relevant for the inquiry, it is the intentions behind their writings, the historical influences that informed them, and the contemporary reception of their thoughts that helps the intellectual historian to reach a meaningful interpretation. Here, the intellectual historian ties to avoid teleological interpretations and is also open for unintended consequences of the actions and ideas of past agents. All this also includes trying to understand the potentially disturbing philosophies of the past in their own right and acknowledging the inconsistencies in the thought of historical agents. Quentin Skinner famously talked of "seeing things their way", whereas another giant of historical theory, Reinhart Koselleck, talked about "the veto right of the sources". Whatmore's preferred metaphors are more flexible. He quotes John Burrow again and talks of the intellectual historian as an eavesdropper of past conversations and a translator between historical societies and our own time.

The book provides a condensed introduction to what intellectual history is and is not, the history of the field, the methods of intellectual history, how some particularly influential studies go about in doing intellectual history, what the justifications for doing intellectual history are, and which types of debates are central to the field at the present. While most of the book concentrates on a British tradition, specifically the so-called Cambridge school, the chapter on the history of intellectual history stands out since it deploys a much broader definition of intellectual history. In this chapter Whatmore shortly engages in the historical semantics of "intellectual history" and "history of ideas" as well as the institutional history of the field. To anyone reading the text, it is clear that the people like Johan Nordström, Arthur Lovejoy, Reinhart Koselleck, Michel Foucault, Leo Strauss, Franco Venturi, and the two key figures of the Cambridge school, John Pocock and Quentin Skinner do not form a coherent school of

thought in any meaningful way, but they can all be associated with intellectual history. A comparison of their work is very useful for any student of intellectual history. (The inclusion of Strauss is the only surprise in this sense, as the Straussian approach is very far from the one that Whatmore advocates in the rest of the book.)

Their relationship to intellectual history also differs. Nordström was the first professor of the history of ideas and learning in Sweden, and founded a learned society in the field as well as *Lychnos*, apparently the first academic journal devoted to the history of ideas. Similarly, Lovejoy, a philosopher by training, founded the *Journal of the History of Ideas* which has been published since 1940. For both of them, branding themselves as historians of ideas, was central. This was not the case for Koselleck, whose conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) was a conscious attempt to criticize *Ideengeschichte* associated with Friedrich Meinecke (who is mentioned elsewhere in the book, but curiously not here). Foucault, who was professor of the history of systems of thought, also relied on the rather different labelling for his scholarship. Venturi, again, was a historian who did influence a school of younger Italian scholars who chose to gather under the label of intellectual history.

The labels are at the same time significant and not. For the student searching for inspiration the labels ought not to stay in the way, but for the historian trying to understand the predicaments of these people and the different regional and national contexts in which they formed their academic milieus, the labels are crucial. For instance, the Swedish early institutionalization of the history of ideas and learning created a discipline that was and is clearly separated from history. This certainly still affects how academics perceive themselves. It may also be a reason for the somewhat reluctant reception of the Cambridge school in Sweden compared to neighboring Denmark and Finland. Whatmore does not pay much attention to differences in the national academic traditions since he is mostly preoccupied with the British case.

In the chapters on method, practice, justification, and present-day debates, the examples get narrowed down and are almost exclusively from historians active in Britain. Most examples deal with the history of political thought in the early modern period or the eighteenth century. Focusing on the scholarship that the author knows best has its obvious downsides for the student searching for a general introduction to intellectual history – if they want to learn about

Foucault, Venturi, Meinecke or Koselleck they need to go elsewhere – but the benefit of writing about the influential scholars that Whatmore is more familiar with is evident. Familiarity is in this case not limited to knowing the work of people like John Dunn, John Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and István Hont, but the text comes very close to these authors in another sense. When Whatmore writes about method and recapitulates parts of Skinner's methodological writings, he does not quote Skinner at length and conduct an exegesis of Skinners thought. For the reader it feels that he rather writes from a tradition in which a number of academics (mostly with a connection to Cambridge) have been discussing the work of Skinner and others in so many different occasions that the methods and theoretical points of the so-called Cambridge school have become a living practice in which the original foundational texts such as Skinner's "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" (1969) are central, but not the whole story. For the outsider reader, it is almost like being an eavesdropper in the seminars in Cambridge, Sussex or Whatmore's St. Andrews. It is this personal take on intellectual history that makes Whatmore's book not only valuable to undergraduate students, but also academics in the field.

One outcome of the personal take is that the book does not study the mentioned key figures as academics taking part in debates, that is, as the objects of an intellectual history, but extracts models and examples from them for future intellectual historians to follow and develop further. This may also be a question of generation, Whatmore treats people like Herbert Butterfield or Arthur Lovejoy as deeply embedded in their particular historical contexts, whereas the generation active from the 1960s onwards is not given this treatment. Interestingly, it is not Skinner or Pocock that gets the most venerate treatment, but are at times criticized by Whatmore, but István Hont, whose work is presented in the section that discusses the motivation for doing intellectual history. Hont's attempt to capture in Hume and Smith a sophisticated way of understanding the interdependence of politics and economy that is relevant also for today's political thought is clearly also what motivates Whatmore's presentation of intellectual history. It is also in the case of Hont, that Whatmore comes to discuss ideas from an interdisciplinary perspective. In this case economic and political thought are necessarily seen as interwoven, but the links to religious thought and scientific developments are also put to the fore.

One particularly interesting section in the book deals with how Pocock and

Skinner have rather similar takes on historical study, which is one reason to talk about a Cambridge school, but at the same time their interpretations on republican thought differ to a large extent (p. 61). This has naturally been the object of much debate and criticism. While the disagreements are nothing surprising, the different normative arguments that Pocock and Skinner have made over the years are slightly more difficult for Whatmore to explain. He seems rather content with Pocock, the "liberal Eurosceptic intellectual" (p. 81), and more skeptical to Skinner's Neo-Roman intervention to politics. Overall, the issue of normative outcomes of contextual intellectual history could have been discussed further. Intellectual history's relevance is partly about its relevance for today, and at the same time the search for relevance often makes poor intellectual history. It is not necessarily the case that strong normative claims result in ahistorical postulations of analytical categories in the past, but also in the cases in which Whatmore discusses normativity critically, this is often where the problem lies. Why is that?

In the past years the practice of intellectual has been confronted by two contemporary trends, the need to move to an international or global perspective and the possibilities of new methods for analyzing the constantly increasing masses of digitized texts. Whatmore shortly addresses the former, but not the latter. Although Whatmore chooses not to speculate, it is clear that the issues he does bring forward will continue to be under constant negotiation also in the near future. One of the key debates in intellectual history has to do with defining the debates or contexts in which past thinkers operated. Skinner and Pocock think differently regarding this, and Jo Guldi and David Armitage have in their *History Manifesto* (2014) forced us to think anew by arguing for a much broader serial contextualization. The promise of large scale digital corpora has to do with better tools for analyzing precisely the different debates in which past thinkers participated. Right now, it seems like it is not Skinner, but rather Pocock, Hont and perhaps also Koselleck, who are becoming more relevant due to new digitized practices of doing intellectual history.

Jani Pekka Marjanen

4 Thomas A. Apel, *Feverish Bodies, Enlightened Minds: Science and the Yellow Fever Controversy in the Early American Republic*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016, p. 191. ISBN 9780804797405, $60.00.

Thomas Apel's book aims at a fully-blown explanation of how the debates on the cause of yellow fevers that took place during the last decade of the 18th century, were influenced by the mindset of early American physicians and intellectuals, and how they, in turn, impacted on society and the public sphere. The author's methodology hinges on a conscious assumption of an interdisciplinary perspective, which is supposed to broaden our interpretation of the medical controversy on yellow fevers by considering its theological, political and philosophical implications. This method of inquiry undergirds Apel's claim of novelty for his study, as opposed to previous accounts of the topic, that focused on particular figures involved in the controversy or on specific aspects of the debate.

The conundrum faced by the doctors working in the newborn American Republic revolved around the cause of a series of outbreaks of yellow fever that ravaged seaport towns from 1793 to 1805. During the same period several cases of yellow fever were also recorded in the West Indies, where Britain and France were at war in consequence of an anti-slavery uprising, eventually resulting in the establishment of Haiti as an independent nation. Therefore, many believed that the cause of fevers was to be found in some material elements that affected bodies by contagion, as many French refugees fled the West Indies and came to the United States, and several American ships travelled to Saint-Domingue and imported goods such as coffee and sugar. The account of those who were called "contagionists" was opposed by the "localists", who contended that the cause of the disease ought to be looked for in agents that originated in the same places where fevers broke out. Especially, they believed that miasmas emanating from putrid matter had noxious effects on humans and provoked the mortal illness that tormented American families during the hot seasons of those years. When epidemics stopped plaguing American seaboards, the explanations of the localists was deemed true by most of those that took issue with them earlier on. Nowadays, we know that the yellow fevers' vectors are the mosquitos called *Aedes Aegypti*, that in the 1790s were carried on American ships coming from the West Indies and thrived as a result of the hot and rainy weather of North-Eastern American shores in the summertime. Thus, the right explanation as to

why America suffered from subsequent waves of epidemics in the late 18th century lies in a middle ground between the account of the localists and that of the contagionists.

Probably the most prominent spokesman of the localists, Benjamin Rush was the physician who signed the Declaration and taught at the University of Pennsylvania for several years. As regards the debate on fevers, his argument rested on the evidence that the disease was endemic to big cities and occurred under specific environmental circumstances. As for the ultimate cause of fevers, Rush surmised that it could be sought in an excess of oxygen in the atmosphere, that would make marshes' miasmas noxious. Also wholeheartedly supporting chemical investigations, Samuel Latham Mitchill, professor at Columbia College, claimed that the cause of yellow fevers was a gas, that he termed "septon", resulting from a particular combination of nitrogen and oxygen, that today is called nitric oxide. However, neither Rush nor Mitchill could offer any empirical proof for their chemical doctrines, and Apel insists on the relevance of speculative reasoning for their explanations. This aspect sharply contrasted, according to Apel, with the importance attached to experiments by Lavoisier and other paramount French chemists. Chemistry, in the hands of American localists, provided a theoretical model that perfectly met their need to locate the cause of fevers in the composition of the air, thereby countering the contagionists' account, that apparently runs into a regress – for where and how did the infective particles appear on the planet in the first place?

On the opposite side, contagionists like William Currie and Isaac Cathrall did not exploit the language and the conceptual framework recently created by the French chemists, and aimed at explanations more tightly related to empirical evidence. However, they did not neglect the influence of the environment on the activation of the material bearers of the disease, thus they never contradicted the Hippocratic philosophy, that insisted both on the observation of facts and on the environmental conditions in which they are explored. Anatomy provided them with a procedural scheme that would supposedly unseal the secrets of nature without drifting towards metaphysical speculations. In order to rebut the assumptions of the localists, the advocates of contagion stressed that outbreaks did not occur in every part of the country where miasmas were produced by dirt and filth; the only places where Americans witnessed the plague were port cities, such as Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore and Norfolk. Therefore, they

recommended that quarantine regulations were imposed on sea merchants and sailors travelling on incoming ships.

On the contrary, localists insisted on cleanliness as a measure that ought to be enforced in every bustling American town. The proposals for the implementation of severer sanitary strictures for big cities reflected extra-scientific concerns of some physicians, who despised urban life, expressing a feeling common to many republicans. By detecting the material vehicle of fever in the filth amassed in narrow and overcrowded American alleys and wharves, physicians like Rush were also able to point out the moral cause of the disease, because uncleanliness was considered a sin. If providence allowed epidemics to killed many early Americans, this was the result of their lack of public virtue. Considering the political implications of the defense of either theory on the origin of the plague, Apel stresses that even on the contagionists' side one can detect underlying extra-scientific reasons for defending this position. Colin Chisholm was a Scotsman who served as a military surgeon before purchasing a cotton plantation in Grenada, a small island in the Caribbean. His account of the origin of the yellow fever in Africa was intended to discourage colonial enterprises on Western African shores, fearing that it would favor abolitionism in the long run. He thus attempted to safeguard the interests of West Indian planters by attributing a remote origin of the epidemic.

A further element that characterized the debate about the cause of fevers that unfolded during those years is the attempt to write disease histories. The lexicographer Noah Webster took a stance in favor of localism in a two-volume history of the pestilences that plagued humanity during the course of past centuries. The book was published in 1799 and analyzed the cause of the plague of ancient Athens as described by Thucydides, alongside many other instances of endemic diseases that ravaged empires, as the one that struck the Eastern Roman Empire at the time of Justinian I, or more recent epidemics, like that of

London during the year 1665. According to Webster, all previous outbreaks of the diseases that he took into account resulted from specific conditions of the air, which, under particular circumstances, displays an "epidemic constitution" – a phrase meant to indicate what earlier physicians called "morbific matter". Also the contagionists sought to buttress their doctrines by looking at historical records of past epidemics. James Tytler, for instance, believed that past occurrences of plagues and epidemic diseases shared a common nature, as they were all caused by the same agents, that were transmitted from one population to another. The ultimate cause of this chain of transmission was God – this way Tytler responded to the accusation of running into a regress about the origin of the contagious matter.

Most importantly, Apel explains that the success of the localists' explanation ultimately hinged on the fact that its theoretical and philosophical underpinnings jibed perfectly with Scottish Common Sense philosophy, that reflected the mindset of early Americans better than alternative trends of thought – especially, deism, atheism and materialism. Physicians like Rush and Mitchill assumed that man's mind was equipped with an inborn apparatus, consisting in trustworthy faculties, that were perfectly fit for understanding reality and its divine origin. Many of the protagonists of the debate had studied in Scotland, where Common Sense philosophy had become common currency after Thomas Reid's attack on Hume in 1764. The existence of God, the capacity of the understanding to grasp the causal structure of the world, and the trust in a benevolent providence were all traits that, according to Apel, American intellectuals drew from Reid and his closest followers, James Beattie and James Oswald. The speculative orientation of many of the inquiries carried on by Rush, Mitchill, Webster and their acolytes must be read on a par with the rationalistic leanings of Common Sense philosophy. Conversely, the explanations elaborated by the contagionists were unable to convince the public, as they did not provide compelling reasons for believing in divine design and the rationality of all natural phenomena. Despite this, the account based on contagion met the standard of the experimental inquiry into reality that, as Apel contends, would eventually lead to the discovery of the real cause of yellow fever through microbiological studies.

The book is indeed well written and keeps the reader enthralled thanks to its compelling narrative. However, some theoretical assumptions that guides

Apel's reconstruction of the controversy on yellow fever are somehow problematic. Firstly, the description of Common Sense philosophy as a form of thought that encouraged analogical reasoning as opposed to experimental philosophy is at least dubious, considering that Reid elaborated an articulated attack on the use of analogies in scientific practices (see, for instance, T. Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, 1.4). Secondly, the assumption that Common Sense warranted the study of causal powers in nature, as opposed to an empirical description of phenomena, is also problematic, because Reid expressly distinguished the causal power of human free will from the constant conjunction of any other series of events, describing natural causality in a strikingly Humean fashion (see *Essays on the Active Powers*, 4.2). Also Apel's personal evaluation of the fever dispute could be called into question, if one did not accept some of the theoretical premises on which it is based. In the last part of the book, the contentious atmosphere that characterized the American public sphere in the 1790s is interpreted as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment in general, on the basis of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Statements like those we find in the conclusion of the book—as for instance "The Enlightenment created a monster" (p. 140)—seem to rely on a very specific understanding of the meaning of the period under discussion, that unfortunately the author never fully articulates.

Sebastiano Gino

5 Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Cambridge, UK - Malden, MA: Polity, 2016, p. 250. ISBN: 9780745684482, HC £55.00, PB £15.99.

The concept of 'intersectionality' has surfaced quite recently, although it was, in a way, at the ready in all polemics against the idea that to some primary form

of oppression all others ought to be reduced, be it class exploitation or women subjugation. Kimberlé Crenshaw at UCLA Law School spotlighted in 1989 the 'intersection of race and sex', and later derived from that intuition an abstract denomination. It is a two-faced notion: it is used as descriptive of a condition, and also as prescriptive or methodological. Since it gives a name to an approach critical of any unitary conception, it is always connected to some extent with some kind of anti-essentialism. Strictly correlate, in fact, with the appreciation of differences, the concept of 'intersectionality' hints to the fact that inequalities are mostly compounded by multiple disadvantages, or multiple barriers to empowerment, that are not considered as additive, rather as co-constitutive and interacting. The concept has quickly autonomized from its feminist origins, and has eventually made it into the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*[1]. Indeed 'intersectionality' is an idea, and any theoretical, or practical and political appreciation of an idea seems to call for a history of the inception, of the spreading, and of debates on and use of the concept; having to do in this case with such a recent conceptual innovation, in this book we find, alongside with a systematic assessment of its object, also a sort of history of ideas practiced from a very close vantage point. A similar effort by A. Vakulenko might be recalled[2], but on a much smaller scale.

From this point of view, which is of obvious interest to the readers of this journal, chapter 3, "Getting the History of Intersectionality Straight?", raises some important questions, first of all by objecting vividly to any historiographic obsession with "points of origin" and "key figures" (63). This is supported with the following remarkable statement: "we take issue with this view that intersectionality began when it was named" (64). This is relevant in itself, both as a kind of 'realist' philosophy of history and as a historiographic stance, although the authors point specifically to the risk of recasting "intersectionality as just another academic field". Given the present tendency to the infinite multiplication of academic fields, based on low-cost intersections of theoretic paradigms

[1] Maryanne Cline Horowitz, ed., *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (Detroit et al.: Thomson Gale, 2005); see in part. Aída Hurtado and Jessica M. Roa, Chicana Feminisms, s.v. "Feminism", at p. 816-17, and Laura R. Woliver, s.v. "Political Protest, U.S.", at p. 1838.

[2] Anastasia Vakulenko, "Gender and international human rights law: the intersectionality agenda", in Sarah Joseph and Adam McBeth, eds., *Research Handbook on International Human Rights Law*, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing 2010) 196-214.

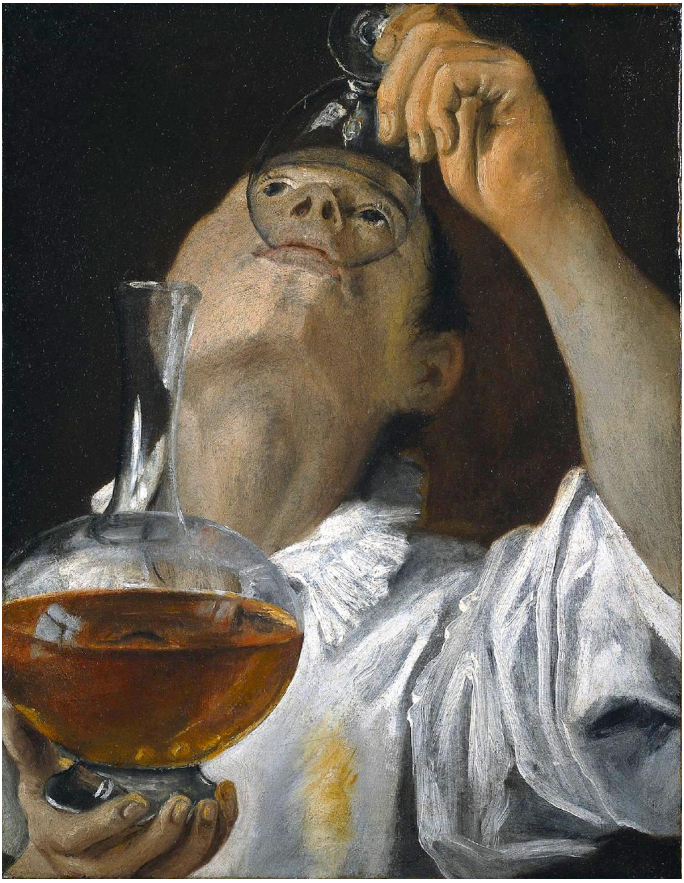
from different or cognate disciplinary historiographies with some lacquer of interdisciplinarity, it is clear that this restraint is good, both intellectually and politically. Anyway, from this book, it emerges that attention to intersectionality would be advantageous to the historian at large and, by all means, to the intellectual historian or the historian of ideas.

6

Jeffrey Weeks, *What is Sexual History?*, Cambridge, UK - Malden, MA: Polity, 2016, p. 180. ISBN: 978-0-7456-8024-8, HC £45.00, PB £14.99.

In the series "What is History" where Richard Whatmore's *What is Intellectual History* also appeared, this book offers, for 'sexual history', an introduction in form, in turn, of a history. It is not in the unrelieved style of the familiar history of historiography, rather it comes up with a sort of biography of the discipline—given the author's involvement with the discipline, we may say a biography from within, or an authorized autobiography. Sexual history turns out to be a history as much of sexual facts as of ideas on sexuality (often of the former as they can be reconstructed from the latter), and it entails a fair lot of intellectual history, as it mostly happens with stories of social and individual practices. We are presented with its inception, for which the author send us back to the medical creation of the vocabulary of sexuality in the 19th century. Yet, just like in the preceding book I am reviewing here, there is a commitment to the existence of reality/ies before 'ideas' and 'names', which is all but obvious when dealing with an object so integrated with social constructions. *What is Sexual History?* offers an interesting reading to historians and intellectual readers, both from a general point of view,and for appreciating the crossing of different disciplinary methods in the study of any new historical object.

Enrico Pasini



Annibale Carracci, Ragazzo che beve, *usually dated 1680-85. It appears on the cover of Gentilcore,* Food and Health in Early Modern Europe.