

Doing Medicine Together: Germany and Russia between the Wars

Susan Gross Solomon, ed.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, xviii + 533 p., \$65.00

This volume deals with the medico-political relations between Germany and Russia after World War I, reaching beyond the period of World War II. As editor Susan Gross Solomon correctly observes in her introduction, both Germany and the new Soviet Russian state had been left out in the international cold by the Treaty of Paris in 1919-20. After the international conference at Rapallo in 1922, Germany capitalized on that pariah situation by commencing diplomatic relations with Moscow, which had, as one of its aims, military co-operation as their goal, as the Russians were keen to build up their Red Army under Leon Trotsky and Germany wished to test weapons forbidden by the western Allies at the behest of General Hans von Seeckt.

The editor calls the volume "Doing Medicine Together," but she might as well have named it "Medicine Together and Against Each Other," for in the medical and public-health arenas Germans and Soviets had constant squabbles, not as often ideologically motivated as one might have expected. At the vortex of several was Heinz Zeiss, a German bacteriologist of dubious qualifications and loyalties, who spent many years in Russia and seems to have been, at various times, a supporter of Russian revolutionary changes, a neutral-acting emissary, and a Nazi advocate. The fact that at least four of the eleven authors (Gross Solomon, Elisabeth Hachten, Wolfgang Eckart, and Sabine Schleiermacher) deal with this physician at length contributes to a certain imbalance affecting the whole volume; one exhaustive chapter on this relatively uninteresting man would have sufficed. For my purposes, I found the British medical historian Paul Weindling's essay of greatest value, as he wrote on German strategic aims in Russia right from World War I on, with the Nazis' view to eastern expansion after 1933—prefigured in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*—falling right in line. An illuminating chapter is contributed by the Russian scholar Marina Sorokina on a rare meeting of Soviet and German medical professionals during the 200th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences, September 1925 in Leningrad and Moscow. Tellingly, world-renowned scholars such as Albert Einstein, Ernest Rutherford, and Marie Curie chose not to follow up on their invitations, and their absence came to be a symbol of the fall from renown by the, now Sovietized, scientific institution. While Michael David-Fox ably elucidates Soviet-Weimar cultural relations, he paints a broader canvas against which questions of medical or public-health import can be discussed. Various agents of the Soviets, including the German-literature scholar Georg Lukacs, who (this is not a subject of the book) after 1945, from his native Hungary, played a signal role in the cultural direction of Communist East Germany, were eager, in the last years of the Weimar Republic, to make contact with fascist activists in Berlin and win them over to their side. Jochen Richter treats Soviet and German mutual brain research; the principal here was Oskar Vogt, who after the mid-1920s was charged with a neurological examination of Lenin's brain. Conveniently for the Russians, Vogt found that Lenin had possessed "genius" (p. 353), but Vogt's subsequent research on brains became first a victim of Stalin's purges and then of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. "Eugenics, *Rassenhygiene* and Human Genetics in the Late 1930s" is the title of Nikolai Kremmentsov's contribution. He once more reminds the reader that eugenics was an important field of study in

the 1930s in Nazi Germany and western countries such as the United States and Great Britain, but also in the Soviet Union. In this case, too, geneticists fell victim to Stalin's purges—the Soviet dictator would later develop a phobia against neurologists and related scientists whom he could suspect of murderous intent. Ulrike Eisenberg and Carola Tischler competently round out the volume with articles on the Berlin neuroanatomist Louis Jacobsohn-Lask's presence in Russia, and the flight of German-Jewish physicians to the Soviet Union after 1933, respectively. Had it not been for the undue emphasis on Zeiss, this volume would have been more compact, more readable, and cheaper to buy—altogether more in keeping with what is, after all, thematically a rather limited subject, not warranting 550 odd pages of print.

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The Deadly Truth: A History of Disease in America

Gerald N. Grob

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, x + 349 p., US\$19.95

Gerald Grob, relying on his over 30 years of experience in teaching and researching American history of medicine, has written a masterful synopsis of morbidity and mortality patterns in American history, from the pre-Columbian era through 1998. Instead of following the traditional social history of medicine pattern of discussing how society views and tries to deal with diseases, popularized by such noted scholars as Charles Rosenberg, Nancy Tomes, and Alan Kraut, Grob has taken a decidedly different approach in his text. He examines the biological reality of the specific diseases that were the leading causes of sickness and death in American history. Grob states that the idealistic view that medicine will in time conquer all diseases is a myth, and that disease-causing organisms are just as much a part of nature as those that promote good health. Gender, race, and class play a very limited role in this text. Instead Grob insists on pointing out the limitations of medical science, both in the past and for the future. Rather than a pessimistic approach to the history of medicine, he states that his is a realistic one, based on recognizing the limitations of medical science. As one disease group has declined in its impact on American society another, different pattern of illnesses has taken their place, with infectious diseases being replaced by long duration chronic diseases in the 20th century.

Grob uses a straightforward chronological approach in his text. Throughout this volume he challenges traditional history of medicine scholarship on a number of issues. In discussing the causes of the high Indian mortality rate after contact with the Europeans, Grob states that Alfred Crosby's "virgin soil" explanation for this exceedingly high death rate is only a partial answer, adding that the Native Americans' homogeneous gene pool made their encounter with new infectious diseases more deadly for them than for the Europeans in the 17th and 18th centuries. Rather than the bad diet of the immigrants and urban poor, Grob blames the inability of all classes in 19th- and early 20th-century America to handle infant and childhood intestinal disorders with the extremely high infant and childhood mortality rate during this period. He points out that while America's economy boomed as it expanded throughout the 19th century, this also spread deadly pathogens to new regions, leading to a higher death rate later