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Anne-Chantal Hardy and Cédric Le Bodic (dir.), *prescrire, proscrire. Enjeux non médicaux dans le champ de la santé*

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An article about the possible ban on two antidiabetic drugs in *Le Figaro* on 27 April 2011 revealed that the medical journal *Prescrire* was nicknamed ‘Prescribe’ in the corridors of the National Agency for the Safety of Medicines and Health Products (ANSM). A single article was sufficient to address doubts and concerns among health professionals. More than a simple play on words, this anecdote unveils the ambivalence of the prescribing act. Ideally, medical professionals, reserving the right to prescribe, do so in the name of scientific, medical, and objective knowledge. Cédric Le Bodic and Anne-Chantal Hardy, the editors of the work, and about 20 contributors from sociology, philosophy, history, psychiatry, etc., aim to demonstrate that reality is not as straightforward.

This book is divided into two parts. The first set of contributions focuses on the topic of procreation, an increasingly medicalised moment in life, but also influenced by ‘ethics’. Jean-Christophe Weber (‘The Indications of IMG. A model for studying the porosity of the medical field’) and Caroline Guibet Lafaye (‘Prescribe, Prescribe: the refusals of IMP in cases of very poor neonatal prognosis’) examines the non-medical aspects of decisions regarding Medical Interruptions of Pregnancy (IMG). Indeed, a medical order legitimises this activity, which is normally considered an infringement of bodily integrity. However, this judgment is not solely based on medical reasoning, as it includes considerations of the ‘social handicap’. Arguments of a ‘moral’ nature are mobilised, notably concerning the well-being of the unborn child, parental responsibility (the child must have a ‘suffering-free’ life), and the resources of the parents.

Thus, the object of prescription and attention evolves significantly, depending on the social and historical context. For example, discussing self-harm (Baptiste Brossard, ‘Self-mutilations in history. Definitions and representations of self-inflicted injuries’) or masturbation (Cédric Le Bodic “‘Styles of thought” in medical discourses on masturbation”) today or a hundred years ago, refers to several different medical realities.

Subsequently, a series of contributions have discussed the use of medical arguments. Laurent Gaissad and Charlotte Pezeril (‘HIV positivity between sexual health and criminalisation’) criticise recent campaigns of ‘judicialisation of AIDS’, using the power of medical prescriptions to influence debates outside the medical sphere. Indeed, regarding AIDS, it is rare for the accused to be certain that they had transmitted the virus to the plaintiff. Thierry Mathé (‘Health through nutrition: the myth of the infallible body and perfect health’) focuses on

nutrition issues and the responses provided by public authorities. This approach is based on the myth of perfect health. This type of action focuses on a purely functionalist view of nutrition, while overlooking that food is not only a response to physiological needs but also has social or ritual significance.

After the discussion, actions were taken. This is at least the centre of concern for the second part introduced by a communication from Christian Merle ('the remedy: between the illusion of facts and the reality of metaphors') around different conceptions of remedies in traditional and scientific medicine. While Jean-Paul Canèvet ('Between the commodification of health and the medicalisation of self-care, the example of fibromyalgia') reflects on a mysterious disease: fibromyalgia (often defined as a medical 'catch-all' category), Sarra Mogul ('Introducing parents to the hospital: therapeutic issues or consideration of the child's emotions?') revisit the introduction of parents to the hospital. Paediatricians were the first to address this, aiming to compensate for the glaring lack of personnel during World War II. Gradually, the hospital was transformed into a school for mothers. Precautions for children are an indicator of their overall wellbeing.

Another object of care is subject to numerous tensions, such as patient bathing. Alain Vilbrod ('private nurses and the delicate question of patient bathing') reminds us that these can constitute more than half of a nurse's activity. However, differences are noted depending on the territory in which the professional operates: the rarer the nurses, the more they focus on Nursing Medical Acts, delegating bathing to other professionals, notably nurse aides.

Finally, Grégory Beret ('The laboratory ship: clinical observations of surgeons and physicians aboard – 18th-19th centuries –') offers a communication about the relationships between practitioners and patients established on warships between the 18th and 19th centuries. Thus, while there exists an entire system of health education, certain products such as alcohol are subject to negotiation, with doctors emphasising the troops' illness well before highlighting the non-compliance of the ship's passengers.

It is up to Anne-Chantal Harry ('Can medicine "make the law"?') to conclude. She chose to focus on the inclusion of prescriptions and proscriptions in the legal register. While medicine can 'make the law' (p. 257), it most often draws its power from its famous 'medical deontology', a guarantee of its supposed 'independence of spirit'. However, as the entire set of communications reviewed has been proven, medicine is dependent on numerous activities. Yet, in the name of this objectivity, medicine intervenes in many societal debates, as an expert, but also as a legitimising instance of the debate: as many avenues of work that researchers in the humanities have to explore.

NOTES

1. Among those not mentioned, Cyril Desjeux ('resistance to medicalised male contraception: technical or sociocultural barrier') on male contraception; Leslie Mohorade ('Prescribe, Prescribe Surrogacy. What "medical discourse" on surrogate mothers?') on surrogacy; Guillaume Brie ('The medical and the management of paedophile sexual criminality') and paedophile sexual criminality; Stéphane Tessier ('Prevention, prescriptions, and proscription). An iconography of the seven deadly sins, from the Middle Ages to the third millennium') on representations of the seven deadly sins in medical imagery; Caroline Després ('Acting in the world, shaping it: public policies and individual preventive behaviours in Brazil') about health prevention policies in Brazil; Yves Guillermain ('Listen and prescribe: "the word and the

pharmakon””) on the prescription of anxiolytics; Isabelle Chemarin and Henri Partouche (‘Modalities of use of the rapid diagnostic test for sore throats – TDR – ’) around the rapid diagnostic test for a sore throat; and finally Véronique Régnier-Denois (‘Fatigue in oncology: normalise or treat?’) about fatigue.