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Florian Mildenberger. *Medikale Subkulturen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und ihre Gegner (1950-1990).* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011. 188 pp. $54.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-515-10041-0.

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The "Mello Tube" (*Mello Röhrchen*), a hollow piece of rubber or bakelite, was one of the typical targets of the Center for the Fight against Dishonesty in the Medical Trade (CFDMT) in the 1950s. Paul Töpfer, a health entrepreneur who had marketed the product since the 1920s, promised his clients deliverance from more than one hundred diseases. The simple application, which patients had to insert into their anus, allegedly prevented autointoxication by relieving the body from poisonous gases. The Mello Tube was just one of many dubious products marketed by health entrepreneurs in the second half of the twentieth century. There were radium cures, low frequency electrical cures, rheumatism cures, weight loss pills, and diluted moor potions. The promoters of these therapies promised to deliver their clients from serious illnesses such as cancer as well as rather diffuse nervous conditions. Some products had prominent supporters. Federal chancellor Konrad Adenauer, for example, used and endorsed the "Gelee Royal", which was marketed as a medicine to enhance sexual performance, prevent cancer, and accelerate healing for other ailments.

Florian Mildenberger, in his book *Medikale Subkulturen in der Bundesrepublik*, maintains that West Germany's grey medical market can be described as "medical subcultures." These subcultures, he argues, were a symbol for people's will to remain independent from a state-sanctioned and regulated medical market. It is not entirely clear whether this assessment refers to the health entrepreneurs, their clients, or both. The claim is problematic, because he cannot examine the subcultures directly but has to rely on the documents collected or produced by the CFDMT, a semi-public organization endorsed by physicians and the Federal League of the Pharmaceutical Industry (Bundesverband der pharmazeutischen Industrie). Founded in the early 1950s by the physician Roman Schüppert, the CFDMT campaigned against the providers of therapies and medicines which were not approved by the Federal Health Office. The author produces a lot of evidence about the activities of health entrepreneurs from

the CFDMT's files, but this material can tell us very little about the motivations of their clients.

Mildenberger rejects historiographical approaches that posit a strict dichotomy between allopathic (orthodox) medicine and complementary therapies. Instead, he argues, the more important dividing line existed between state-approved and unlicensed providers of therapies and medicines. This claim has its merits, but the book would have benefited from a clearer exposition of the conceptual framework. Most of the literature that deals with German medical subcultures uses the term "alternative medicine" to emphasize a fundamental ideological opposition to regular medicine. Mildenberger prefers to talk about "complementary medicine," but he does not explain why he prefers this term. His book is certainly the first thorough scholarly monograph on aspects of the grey medical market in the Federal Republic. But his explanation for the previous neglect of this topic is strangely deterministic. Historians, he speculates, have shown little interest in the grey medical market because they tend to be upper middle-class. Since social and medical history are primarily exercises in self-reflexivity, he argues, many historians did not develop much interest in a market that reflected the subcultural preferences of the lower classes. It is certainly plausible that historical understanding is shaped by a historian's cultural assumptions and prejudices. But if one reduces historical scholarship to mere exercises in self-reflexivity, historical understanding becomes impossible.

Most of the book consists of short chapters that introduce specific therapies or medicines. The products of "illegitimate" therapies and their promoters may have changed over the decades, but the peddling of dubious medical products has a long history going back to the nineteenth century, when physicians and health reformers argued about the benefits of vegetarian diets and natural therapies which were marketed by entrepreneurs like Friedrich Bilz and Louis Kuhne. One would have liked to know what was distinctive about the grey medical market in the Federal Republic. Were the phenomena described by Mildenberger unique to this period or were they characteristic of a modern medical market more generally? As Mildenberger shows, many of the dubious medical providers did not present themselves as opponents of modern medicine or science. To the contrary, when medical entrepreneurs peddled low-frequency electrical or radium cures they appealed to popular understandings of science and technology. Other aspects of the study are less convincing. Mildenberger alludes to a wide range of disparate scientific, social, and subcultural developments but he does not develop his ideas systematically, and the relationship of these issues to his main themes often remains unclear. This is particularly evident in his conclusion, where he discusses the role of the medical profession, the relationship between laboratory science and the pharmaceutical industry, the role of teleshopping networks like QVC, the effectiveness of Paul Ehrlich's Salvarsan, and the rise of amateur porn, among many other things. These might all be more or less worthy subjects of scholarly inquiry, but how are they related to the history of the medical subcultures, which the author tries to analyze?

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