

that could be ‘cured’ by lifelong oestrogen replacement. The first period saw older women through societies’ ‘maternalist ideology’. Women were mothers, and when their reproductive functions waned hardly anyone noticed. Eventually, physicians saw menopause as a minor transition, but women were demonized for exacerbating it. Physicians assumed that women brought on their own surges of emotionality, depression and anxiety, as feminine superstition, gossip and too much idle time for bridge produced a psychological overreaction. The popular literature even warned that menopausal self-pity ‘poisoned’ marriage, leading husbands to seek sexual liaisons with younger women. By the 1970s, oestrogen treatment quadrupled, as Wilson and the drug companies that funded him tried to instil fear of the decrepit and valueless lives that menopause caused.

Houck’s treatment is most original and convincing for the third period. Acknowledging that Wilson’s approach was entirely sexist, she argues that earlier historical accounts overstate his impact on the medical community – there was no misogynistic medical consensus on the value of oestrogen therapy – and on women. Neither fully bought the value of lifelong oestrogen therapy or the disease concept. Instead, physicians challenged Wilson’s alarmist rhetoric, raising genuine medical concerns about cancer and osteoporosis. Aided by the women’s movement, many women chose their own course. Though some feminists condemned Wilson, others praised him because he motivated women to retain control of their bodies and helped challenge the patriarchy of the traditional doctor–woman relationship. Paradoxically, after the 1975 oestrogen cancer scares, debates about Wilson’s views focused society on women’s health and gave women options. Though her writing sometimes seems repetitive, Houck does an admirable job of presenting the diversity of – and interplay between – medical views, advice and the lived experiences of women. There was no single menopausal experience. The father-knows-best self-presentation of mid-century medicine masked the rumblings of enormous change that affected different women in different ways. Houck even speculates that the rise of oestrogen use in the 1960s had as much to do with America’s emerging drug culture as with a plot to feed women oestrogen. She notes, for example, that many women were given oestrogen only when they demanded it after the Valium first prescribed by their physicians was ineffective.

Sengoopta also addresses menopause, revealing important cultural differences early in the century. Interestingly, however, only Sengoopta deals with male menopause. The condition was widely recognized in Europe and America between 1910 and 1950. But in the co-construction of gender and menopause, male menopause was not primarily an endocrine problem. Because a man’s life was so much broader, male climacteric was often treated as nervous and mental in nature, more the province of psychiatry than of endocrinology. But as hormone therapy became widely available, clinicians gave testosterone (and oestrogen) to menopausal men, just as they gave oestrogen (and testosterone) to women. Sengoopta’s account stops just before Wilson presented menopause as a uniquely female disease. Perhaps this, too, is part of Wilson’s legacy. As they debated the disease issue in women, doctors and scientists deconstructed male menopause. Meanwhile, the shift to youth, beauty and sex allure over motherhood as criteria for women’s ‘worth’ deepened a gender division that rendered the male climacteric obsolete.

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PIERRE HADOT, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*. Tr. Michael Chase. Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. xii + 399. ISBN 978-0-674-02316-1. \$29.95, £19.95, €25.50 (hardback).
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Pierre Hadot, professor emeritus of the Collège de France, has written a remarkably insightful book on the theme of the secrets of nature and their significance for the history of science

and ideas about nature. First published in 2004 by Editions Gallimard, it is now available in English through Michael Chase's adept and eloquent translation. Hadot delves into numerous classical, medieval and early modern sources to analyse three interlocking themes: Heraclitus' famous aphorism 'nature loves to hide', the idea of the secrets of nature and the image of Nature as Isis/Artemis. These three themes are articulated through two attitudes towards nature. The first attitude is symbolized by Prometheus, and is manifested by human efforts to extract nature's secrets through magic and, ultimately, through science and technology for practical use by humankind – sometimes with disastrous and unforeseen consequences. The second is symbolized by Orpheus, and represents a poetic, aesthetic approach that appreciates nature's secrets as mysterious and ineffable, viewing nature as a poem evincing awe, anguish, terror and wonder. Hadot argues that the Promethean attitude reaches its height during the mechanistic revolution of the seventeenth century, whereas the Orphic attitude emerges most fully in the Romantic era (Rousseau, Goethe, Schelling, Nietzsche), and is continued into the present era by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein. Hadot's own sentiments lie most strongly with the second attitude.

In Hadot's account, the idea that nature harbours secrets that were hidden from the vulgar was intimately bound up with the personification of Nature at least into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Consistent with Heraclitus' aphorism, personified Nature was understood as guarding 'her' secrets, concealing them under veils that hid the primary causes and workings of the living world, including the divine cause of the cosmos itself. In addition to quoting from a multitude of historical sources, Hadot astutely analyses a series of some eighteen illustrations that depict the unveiling of Nature personified as the fusion of the multibreasted Artemis and the Egyptian Isis, who states, 'No mortal has raised my veil'. Seventeenth-century science, as heir to the twin legacies of classical mechanics and the occult sciences, set for itself the goal of unveiling the secrets of nature through experimentation and mathematics. Johannes Kepler, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Blaise Pascal, Descartes, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek and others framed much of their thinking in the tradition of uncovering the structures, parts and causes that nature conceals. But the progress of rational science and the dissociation of physics from philosophy ultimately undermined this tradition, with physics coming to focus on physical nature and philosophy on the problem of being itself.

Of particular interest to historians of science will be Hadot's conception of the Promethean attitude and the mechanization of nature. For some scientists, Nature allows herself to be unveiled by experimental science. For others, Nature is viewed as an enemy whose secrets must be torn from her by technology and even violence. Thus Francis Bacon, writes Hadot, 'declared that Nature unveils her secrets only under the torture of experimentation' (p. 35; also pp. 93 and 149). Hadot's analysis is significant for its focus on Nature as female both in reality and as metaphor during the Renaissance and early modern era, although he does not probe the idea of the secrets as sexual. Also, there are numerous instances of the Promethean unveiling of nature (for instance, in the unveiling of the secrets of the atom and the nucleus) in the twentieth century that Hadot does not pursue, his primary exemplars being confined to the mechanistic revolution. But whatever view the reader may hold of the rise of science or of the consequences of the Promethean attitude, *The Veil of Isis* is a rewarding voyage through a multitude of texts, illustrations and historical figures that brings a set of complex and often contradictory ideas into a clear and compelling argument.

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