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Belief, Virtue, and Illness in Late-Nineteenth Century Domestic Manuals

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Belief, Virtue, and Illness in Late-Nineteenth Century Domestic Manuals

Anneka Walton // Utah State University

Mentor: Dr. Seth Archer // Utah State University



Project Introduction

Overview

- Cookery and Culture Collection at Utah State University
 - Interesting
 - Topics and Times
 - Audience
- Modern-Day Health Biases
 - Obesity
 - High Blood Pressure
 - Chronic Illness
 - Familial Hypercholesterolemia
- Concept of Illness as a Result of Sin

Purpose

Implicit biases of physicians affect the care and outcomes of patients, as does the understanding the patient has of their own illness. Understanding what beliefs physicians and patients had regarding the causes of illness in the past may help us to objectively evaluate modern beliefs and attitudes related to the cause of illness.

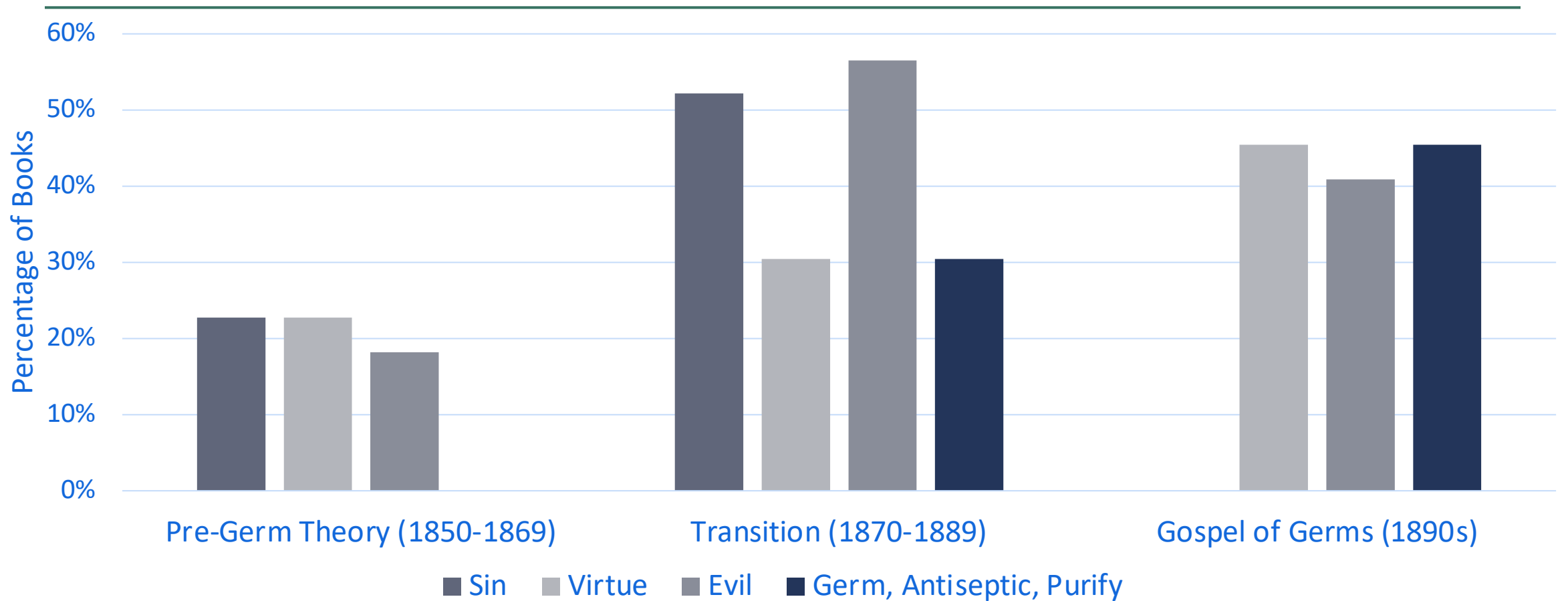
Methods



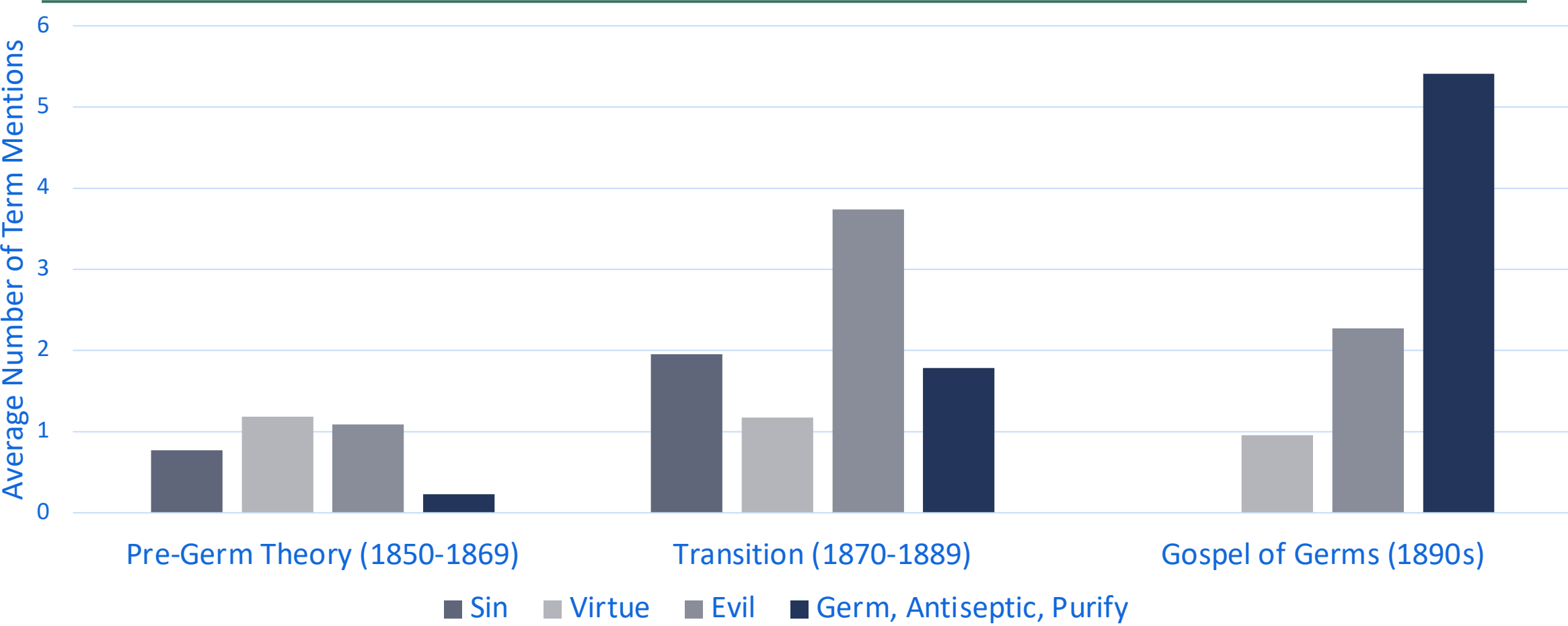
Methods

- Identified collection
- Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*
- Divided collection into Eras
- Keyword Searches
- Collection of Quotes
- Analysis

Percentage of Books in Each Era that Use Term



Average Number of Term Mentions Per Books



Results

Pre-Germ Theory (pre 1870)

- Germ Theory beginnings
- Bad digestion
- Bad Air
- Immoral actions -> Indigestion
- Battlefield Infections
- Healing
 - If Illness is a result of immorality, repentance can allow for physical cures

“If any one is permitted to die with all these prescriptions before them, it must be because a proper attention is not given ; for God most undoubtedly works through the use of means, and is best pleased to see his children wear out, rather than break by collision of machinery on the way.”

Transition (1870-1890)

- Zymotic Disease & Animalcules
- Disease could be Preventable
- Purification became a greater theme
- Cleanliness became a Godly virtue
- Zymotes/Animalcules -> Indigestion

“Temperance, cleanliness, and
all good habits, do much to
prevent... disease. “

Wilcox, E. Woods. (1884). Practical housekeeping: a careful compilation of tried and approved recipes. Minneapolis, MN.: Buckeye
Pub. Co..

Germ Theory and the Gospel of Germs (Post 1890)

- “Gospel of Germs” and War on Germs
- Role of Housewives
- Food Safety

Talmage, J. Edward., Utah. Territorial Convention of School Officers. (1892). Domestic science: a book for use in schools and for general reading. Second and revised edition. Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co..

“The person who has ignored God's law of health and who has weakened his body through injurious exercise has little means of defense against the invading hosts of contagious germs”

Conclusion

Whether the cause of illness was bad air, indigestion, bad food, or germs, the conviction that morality could have an effect on one's outcome persisted. Those who maintained healthy and virtuous habits could be spared from harm.

I would argue that we are not far advanced from our ancestors in terms of ethical perceptions of the health of citizens. We still blame many patients for adverse health conditions, and this can result in delayed care and worse patient outcomes.

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“Minute living organisms, and even animalcules, are also found in the air, and it is very probable that this kind of impurity is a far more frequent cause of Malaise, and even of disease, than is at present known, but there is no evidence to show that such additions to the atmosphere act as food”

“An interesting discussion occurred some time ago on Professor Tyndall's assertion that not only particles of dust, but organic germs may be arrested by passing the air through cotton-wool, so that an apparatus may readily be prepared to be worn over the mouth by those who are specially exposed to either, or in conducting various trades, or in presence of infection .”