Temperance and Modernity: Alcohol Consumption as a Collective Problem, 1885–1913

Abstract

My aim is to analyse how the alcohol question and its responses were framed in the formative period in 1885–1913, when the international anti-alcohol conferences were taking shape. How was the alcohol problem framed in terms of current discussions on general themes such as the individual’s role in society, the challenges of modernity and the contribution of science in solving a problem that was traditionally seen as a moral issue? The anti-alcohol conferences of 1885–1913 can be seen as an arrangement for the modern state where the temperance movement placed itself in the service of the state and at the same time demanded that it be given some responsibility for the future development. These were years when the nation acted as a point of reference in several questions that were chafing within the modern project: population qualities and the condition of future generations, the notion of citizenship, industrial strength and competitiveness, the role and the strength of the state. That nation which desired industrial competitiveness, an efficient infrastructure and a strong military institution also did well to ally itself with those temperance advocates who met at the transnational anti-alcohol conferences. The nation which had such objectives and wanted to see sober and strong citizens was encouraged also by the progressive forces in the temperance movement to take up a whole host of issues from women’s political status to an individual’s sex life.

Introduction

We have been happy to maintain some feeble bonds of union between our friends in England, France, Germany and Russia, who are now engaged in a frightful war with each other, but who still have not forgotten that they are interested in the same ideal work and that they formerly enjoyed friendly intercourse.1
To Robert Hercod, who wrote these words in the autumn of 1915, the First World War was an irritating obstacle to his work. He was the director of the International Temperance Bureau (ITB), which in 1923 changed its name to the International Bureau Against Alcoholism (IBAA) and was again renamed in 1964 as the International Council on Alcohol and Alcoholism (ICAA). The International Temperance Bureau had been founded in 1907 as a central library for temperance movements around the world. It was tasked with collecting literature and informing writers, authorities and the public about the temperance cause in order to battle disinformation and myths and to strengthen the overall mission of the temperance movement. Together with a permanent organizational committee, the ITB would go on arranging international temperance or anti-alcohol conferences, which had already been held in various countries since 1885. It is these conferences that this article will examine.

My aim is to analyse how the alcohol question and its responses were framed in the formative period in 1885–1913, when the international anti-alcohol conferences were taking shape. While it may be somewhat misleading to treat this era as a uniform entity—as a pre-war la belle époque—the period did embrace modernity, ideals of professionalism, struggles of popular movements, colonialism and a relative innocence before the great disaster of 1914. I will therefore focus on continuity rather than change.

The investigated conferences were important in several respects. First, they were an expression of the alcohol question having become such an important social political question as to render possible meetings of this magnitude. Second, they actually functioned as key sites for international knowledge and policy dissemination in the alcohol field ever since the very first conference in 1885 and continued to do so for another hundred years. Some international conferences had been arranged on the alcohol issue since the first temperance conference in 1846, but the studied conferences were the first institutionalised and frequently held meetings for researchers, government officials and NGO representatives to gather around the topic which was often described as the most critical issue for Western civilization at the time. By focusing on alcohol related topics, the conferences also put society at large on the meetings’ agenda.

In the article I try to answer questions about how the alcohol problem was depicted in terms of consequences, causes and potential solutions. However, this functions primarily as a background to my main research interest: how was the alcohol problem framed in terms of current discussions on general themes such as the individual’s role in society, the challenges of modernity and the contribution of science in solving a problem that was traditionally seen as a moral issue? My primary source materials are the 14 conference proceedings from the international alcohol conferences held during 1885–1913 (see table 1). These proceedings tell us who the participants were and which organizations were present. The reports give us access to formal speeches and other expressions of conference etiquette, to minuted discussions and—what is clearly most important in terms of this study—to the participants’ papers which had been dispatched and were read aloud in the conference. The agenda listed such items as a temperance organization’s work, legislation intended to curb the misuse of alcohol, the degenerating impact of alcohol on the next generation and the most appropriate way of providing treatment to alcoholics. My account builds on the common and recurring topics and themes in these conferences. Previous research and theoretical aspects will be discussed with each theme.
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I will next briefly examine the alcohol problem, the organization of the conferences and the role of the temperance movement. This will be followed by responses to the alcohol problem, the nature of this question as a collective problem and the role of alcohol in the modern society. The article concludes with a round-up of the arguments.

Temperance Movement and Conferences

"Ebrietas est mater omnium vitiorum," drunkenness is the mother of all vices, maintained Viktor Almquist, office manager of the Swedish Prison Administration Board, making a reference to church father Origen at the 1907 conference in Stockholm. This message was the undercurrent of the first decades of the conferences: as the sociologist Harry G. Levine has put it, alcohol was a scapegoat for all kinds of social problems. It would seep into every nook and corner of society, destroying all the good that civilization and modernity would have otherwise been able to offer. The scientific and social advances that had been made over several hundred years were now threatened, as mental disturbance increased more rapidly than did the population. This, to a large extent, was due to the consumption of alcohol. In the conferences, it was argued that drunkenness led to criminality, poor health, increased mortality and poverty. Inspector of the British alcoholic institutions R. W. Branthwaite summarised the problem elegantly in the 1909 conference in London:

Every inebriate is either a potential criminal, a burden upon public funds, a danger to himself or others, or a cause of distress, terror, scandal, or nuisance, to his family and to those with whom he associates.

It is against this menacing picture that the nineteenth-century progress of the national temperance movements is to be understood. The issue also called for transnational collaboration, especially because ever more people were being incorporated into an international world. Both people and information travelled farther and more quickly, and the economic, social and cultural development created new possibilities across national borders for various interest groups. As the historian Lovisa af Petersens has shown in her study on the international women’s conferences, the transnational context and the very use of an international discourse provided a resource for political struggle and debate. Political scientist Mark Lawrence Schrad finds similar mechanisms at work in the alcohol conferences’ references to a global or international community: such references “served to legitimize temperance activity as a worldwide moral battle between universal principles of good and evil, right and wrong.” Schrad’s study on the international anti-alcohol conferences in 1885–1934 seeks to establish their role as a formative and legitimating arena for the prohibition cause within the temperance movement. The anti-alcohol efforts led, among other things, to the total prohibition of alcohol in the United States in 1920–1933. It makes sense, in the context of the transnational prohibition movement, to study how the conferences could contribute to such an effect, but in my analysis the conferences serve a bigger function as a site of political formation, scientific exchange and networking between individuals and organizations.

The first in the series of international anti-alcohol conferences examined here took place in the autumn of 1885 in Antwerp, with more than 500 delegates
coming together around the alcohol question. From the vantage point of Schrad’s research area, this conference paved the way for “the maturity stage of network development” in the international temperance and prohibition movement.\textsuperscript{10} The conferences kept expanding, attracting more delegates and countries, and, as Schrad argues, “the transnational advocacy network grew broader and deeper.”\textsuperscript{11} But the conferences played an even bigger role than this. The first contributions already speak of a certain breadth of scope: one paper addressed the history of English alcohol legislation, another presented the work of the Swiss temperance societies and a third discussed the care of alcoholics in western Germany.\textsuperscript{12}

But it cannot be denied that the temperance movement had an important impact on the organization and agenda of the conferences during the first decades. The conferences offered an arena for friends of temperance and prohibition to exchange information and experiences. They also inspired teetotallers to meet and build new international societies with like-minded teachers, clergy and students, for example. The middle-class base of the early temperance movement was much in evidence in many other ways, too.\textsuperscript{13} The mood of the temperance movement can also be gleaned from that the conferences did not really talk about the alcohol problem. Rather, from the very first meeting in Antwerp in 1885 until the 1956 congress in Istanbul, these were conferences against alcohol misuse or alcoholism. The preface to the first conference already determines that the ultimate goal in the common value system of the temperance movement, “la cause de la tempérance,” is a veritable fight, “la lutte contre l’alcoolisme.”\textsuperscript{14} This normative ambition was reiterated in the rules and regulations of the organizational committee.\textsuperscript{15}

But the conferences kept growing, with more delegates from more countries, more interest groups from different professions and more wide-ranging topics. Schrad sees this as an expression of the increasing professionalization of the transnational temperance movement, while I prefer to explain it rather as a sign of the conferences serving more and broader objectives than just meeting the needs of the temperance and prohibition movement.\textsuperscript{16} This interpretation is also shared by the historian Ian Tyrrell: the temperance movement did make a contribution to the conferences, but it was not the only one to do so.\textsuperscript{17} The conferences were in many cases magnificent events, producing declarations and debates over many long days, mixing these with lectures open to the general public, smaller gatherings of specialist societies or professions, banquets and excursions. The presentations and discussions focused on alcohol from a great many different perspectives. One could also argue that alcohol was the framework for debates ranging from the condition of women to the state’s role in the modern society. This is why my emphasis is not so much on alcohol as on the overarching themes which were characteristic of the period and made themselves felt when one of the big contemporary problems was to be explained and solved. However, to understand the alcohol problem which served as a sort of catalyst for these overall themes, I will first elaborate on some frequently discussed methods for solving the problem.

Solving the Problem

The alcohol problem was of the most serious kind; this the conferences never contested. The answers were necessarily comprehensive and drastic and entailed variations of still recognisable alcohol policies: prevention, treatment and restricted consumption.
Prevention

Ever since its organization in the 1830s, the temperance movement had found moral suasion a plausible method of combating the alcohol problem. The middle-class-based temperance movement had undertaken an education project that aimed not only at sobriety, but as sociologists Pekka Sulkunen and Katarina Warpenius argue, also sought to “discipline the rising working class for whom the public drinking places were venues of political agitation and causes of relaxed attitudes toward factory hours.” Schrad maintains, however, that the steps from moral persuasion to legislative coercion had already been taken at “the ascendant stage,” that is, before 1885. According to him, this development coincided with a professionalization of the transnational network: religious influences had to give way to “leaders of national and international temperance organizations, representatives from local temperance lodges, government regulatory bureaucrats, and official delegates from legislative and executive bodies.” To Schrad, the increasing number of government representatives and official state delegates at the conferences represents a more symbiotic relationship between the temperance movement and government powers.

I argue that Schrad’s conclusions need to be qualified in two respects. My own examination of the source material shows, first, that the conferences still kept flying the moral, educating and individually-minded colours. And second, the division or antagonism between moral education and state-issued control is not made entirely clear. Governments can, with or without popular consent, act more or less morally—and government legislation can therefore manifest a moral will. Where the significant division lies perhaps is whether governments can be persuaded to act (on moral, scientific or other grounds) or whether this action should be delegated to individuals, associations and the civil society. Also, in many instances action was taken by both entities, as Sulkunen and Warpenius aptly put it:

In temperance discourse the modern individual unfolding in nascent industrial culture was therefore divided into two parts: the inner Self and the external citizen. The enlightened nation-state, imbued with aspiration and commitment to moral and social progress, was thought to be the external instrument for constructing the inner Self of citizens, capable of self-control and competent to act as sovereign members of society.

The coupling of self-control and temperance was also made at the conferences, and here one must register the ambiguity of the concept itself: while temperance denotes abstinence from alcohol, it may also refer to a moderation of sorts. Self-control is therefore both a cause and an effect: it is what one needs to abstain from alcohol and what one loses by virtue of drinking, it was argued at the conference in Basel in 1895.

In the fight for temperance, many conference contributions talked about the role of the press, confidence in non-governmental action and freedom of the press in general. But often the temperance movement also allied itself with other progressive causes in order to influence government and legislation. As social work researcher Jim Baumohl and sociologist Robin Room have identified, such causes included "movements for prison reform, for the abolition of slavery, for women's
rights, for national self-determination, and for the rights of workers. The alliance with the women’s rights movement was to an extent linked with an image of women as particularly adept temperance workers. This partly justified their political rights and partly gave them a special role in pro-temperance work. It was heard on repeated occasions at the conferences that the fight against drunkenness hinged on women’s ability to organise around the problem. In the words of Charles Petithan, a physician: “Ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut”—what the woman wants, God wants. Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) worker Charlotte Gray hence maintained in the 1887 conference in Zurich that the future of the civilised countries depended on what women did and allowed to be done.

The consequences of the misuse of alcohol were often felt at home, and in accordance with the familistic ideology common among the middle class, the home was seen as the woman’s domain. This view was reinforced when a growing number of working-class women also joined the ranks of housewives at the time. The temperance movement highlighted the women’s role as mothers and their impact on the rising generation. Women’s increased visibility in the public space also contributed to concerns being voiced about their drinking. Expecting and breastfeeding women should be persuaded to abstain from alcohol, and the conference in 1890 duly aimed to put right the general notion that beer was beneficial to lactation. The 1907 conference in Stockholm idolised the home and the mother while painting a picture of alcohol as the enemy of this idyll. Women had a prescribed role in this fight, “for the world turns out in large part what the women make it.” Their role had many facets: women were role models, mothers and housekeepers—albeit not yet partners in legislative work. The home was not only a private sanctuary. As Mr and Mrs Bramwell Booth argued in the 1909 conference in London, the home was “the seed plot of a nation’s continued existence” and “the spring from which proceeds all that is essential to the true patriotism of a people, to the real power of any community, and to the sustained influence of national life and institutions.”

Treatment

The moral uplift that some in the temperance movement advocated can mostly be likened to some of today’s efforts in preventive measures in the drug abuse field. But we can also find that the treatment of individual misusers was given increasing attention during the years that the first anti-alcohol conferences were held. Medically-oriented alcohol treatment was justified in Great Britain at the end of the nineteenth century as a humane and scientifically based alternative to condemning moralism. Coercive treatment, too, was increasingly considered in the early twentieth century as a means of incapacitating difficult misusers of alcohol. In the early 1900s in English-speaking countries and Germany, alcohol treatment institutions were at the height of their popularity. Different treatment possibilities had been on the conference agenda ever since the first congress in 1885, and in 1899 the delegates learnt more about the treatment which had been given at the Turva refuge in Finland since 1888. The inmates’ care consisted of abstinence and restoration of physical strength through physical labour and exposure to fresh air. The soul would gain its moral strength through Christian discipline and rigorous drill.
Treatment at Turva was subject to a charge, and the appropriately exclusive clientele were expected to view their stay as relatively pleasant in a home-like environment. When it came to poor drinkers, coercive measures were rather more prominent on the wish list. Coercion was advanced as a protection of sorts against contagion, as a means of controlling the misusers’ bad influence on the environment but also as an opportunity to keep them from procreating. This aspect became more important once the racial hygienic arguments spread in the early part of the twentieth century (see below). In some cases coercive care was also justified as a paternalistic measure against the misuse, to “protect the enslaved inebriate against himself.” However, the alcohol problem had tentacles all over and the misuser of alcohol could appear in a multitude of guises. This led R. W. Branthwaite to propose in London in 1909 a truly heterogeneous treatment system that made use of the entire range of techniques from encouragement and physical exercise to drugs and hypnosis, from “Christian science, faith-healing, or even [. . .] judiciously applied humbug.” However, most cases would probably not be helped without some sort of coercive measures.

Restrictions

The treatment of alcohol misusers touched on the larger question of government right and duty to solve the alcohol problem. In Great Britain, for example, one discussed whether the state and the physicians should unite to solve the question. This development was recognised in other countries, too. Alcohol functioned, as criminologist Nils Christie has put it, “as a sort of trigger for state action.” With reference to the liberal politician William Gladstone, the 1895 conference aired the view that the primary duty of the state “should be so to legislate as to make it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong.” Two years later, in Brussels in 1897, the ideological conflict was plainly articulated. According to the speaker, a French priest, it was equally self-evident for the state to act against alcohol misuse as against private nuisance or vagrancy. This train of thought could admittedly seem strange in the eyes of a true liberal—as exemplified by “l’école Manchestérienne”—but when something as crucial as national population material was at stake, one was not to be deterred from state intervention.

The foremost question was the sale of alcohol and whether it should be restricted or even forbidden. The alcohol industry was depicted as a notable enemy in this fight. The industry was not content with producing the poison, but also organised—as early as the 1860s—to lobby against the temperance cause. Additionally, many conference papers took up the question of alternative use of spirits within the industry as a compromise that could please both the devotees of sobriety and the alcohol industry.

The question of a total ban long remained relatively abstract, as no country had even tested this measure until prohibition was introduced in Russia in 1914 as part of the war mobilization campaign. At the end of the nineteenth century one rather preferred to pursue the question of sales restrictions, in many cases as a conscious strategy to counter demands for a total ban, which was advocated by some factions of the temperance movement. The conferences eagerly discussed the option of an alcohol state monopoly towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1890 Charles Robert Drysdale, a noted physician and advocate of Malthus, proposed that alcohol, dangerous as it was, could only be sold through
pharmacies. Reference was also made on many occasions to the so-called Gothenburg system, which had been introduced in Sweden in 1865 and aimed to remove the interest of profit from the alcohol trade. The system was later adopted in Norway and Finland, too.48 According to Schrad, more than half the of countries in the world introduced or tightened some kind of alcohol controls at around the same time in the 1910s.49 But by now the European and North American agenda also included a total ban, and in this process, historian Robert A. Hohner argues, the anti-alcohol conferences played a significant part.50

But it would be a mistake to treat the conferences—or the heterogeneous temperance movement—as a unified whole. The debates on alcohol restrictions are a case in point. Several conference presentations discussed the pros and cons of controls and an all-out ban.51 In the 1907 conference in Stockholm this led to such heated debates that some speakers felt compelled to advise the delegates “that they should remember that they were taking part in a congress which had set as its aim to debate the alcohol question dispassionately and that this was to be expected even more in a scientific session.”52 The presentation on the American prohibition movement was also followed by a vehement debate, although not as severe as in the 1903 conference in Bremen.53 The conflict continued in London in 1909, when R. W. Branthwaite accused the organised teetotallers of not being pragmatic enough to care for the unfortunate alcohol misusers: “The cry of the total abstainer is ‘universal abstinence’, and nothing short of that will please him.”54 The conference organisers took great pains to create a tolerant debate climate, but this was not respected, and there was often only a veneer of unity in terms of both aims and means.55

A Collective Problem

However, whether one championed sales restrictions or total prohibition, moral education or treatment, the alcohol problem was part of a bigger picture. Out of mainly epistemological necessity, causes were sought, for example, in regularities and principles of a medical or social nature. The answers were often a match for the causes, also when they were brought from the general to the individual level, while the objectives would aim at a collectively binding solidarity. Alcohol misuse was part of a complicated social problem, a formidable catalogue of all sorts of evils which in the social historical studies on the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century have been called the labour question, the poverty question, pauperism or the social question depending on what was to be examined and for which ends.56 Modern social policies were to a great extent shaped by the educated middle class, whereas the alcohol problem was archetypically embodied by working-class men.57 Examples of copious alcohol consumption among the upper classes further helped to carve out the source of modern social policies as devout, orderly, entrepreneurial and middle class.58

The collective problem was firmly established in the growing and politically ever more significant working class. The predominant problem formulation was future-oriented and occupied itself with such entities as people, culture and nation. To solve the alcohol problem was to safeguard a better future. The concern about troublesome youth was evident in both contemporary debates and crime statistics, and the anti-alcohol conferences frequently addressed the import of children’s and young people’s temperance education.59 According to a
presentation in the 1890 conference, such education of children was “the wisest
and most certain method of combating intemperance.”60 The role of the school
and temperance education were conference staples, to such an extent in fact that
it was argued in Stockholm in 1907 that one rarely got to hear anything new, as
the question was already “debated to death.”61

It was nevertheless an important subject, for the youth was the future. The
increased alcohol consumption which had been reported in the German coun-
try-side was therefore alarming, because the countryside was “the well of youth from
which our tribe shall one day draw its vitality.”62 The youth were also a resource
in temperance work, partly because they were attracted by the patriotic signifi-
cance of the temperance question and partly because they were fascinated by a
battle of this kind.63 The fight for the youth’s welfare was thus manifestly bound
up with the nationalistic character of the temperance question.

Nationalism

“Save the children and you will save the State!,” recited general secretary of the
United Kingdom Band of Hope Union, Charles Wakely, in the 1890 conference
in Christiania, and went on:

If the children of today are taught to grow up sober and intelligent, the manhood
and womanhood of the future will be secure. If, on the other hand, they remain
unwarned, and thus become intemperate and sensual, the national shame and
degradation will grow with the lapse of years, and the thraldom of drink will re-
strain as with hand of iron, every effort on behalf of social purity and peace.64

Youth and nation were inseparable. “Nation” held that force which could take
the anti-alcohol battle beyond individual inebriation. The temperance move-
ment regularly found allies in other progressive causes, and as part of this partner-
ship intoxicants came to be identified as a threat to the nation just when the
nation was a crucial tenet in the identity of the modern states’ growth. “Nation”
and “national character” were unquestioned points of reference, for example, in
the opposition to the alien opium trade, but also in the domestic defence of the
French wine production, which since the 1890’s had increasingly been depicted
as central to the French national character.65 The educated middle class of the
temperance movement made use of nationalism, as it gave them more widespread
popular support and confirmed their self-image as the leading force of modern
society.66

The conferences made regular reference to the nation as falling prey to the
alcohol problem. Drunkenness was the cause of “our national disgrace and degra-
dation,” and alcohol was depicted with respect to “its baneful effects upon indi-
vidual and national life.”67 The responses also rose from this context. For
instance, the good employer was expected to set an example in terms of temper-
ance, “to sink self indulgence in a wise and patriotic effort for the good of the
people.”68 The citizens “should be an asset of the nation, not a liability,” which
called for a tribute:

Health, efficiency, wise economy, brotherliness, morality—these are qualifica-
tions which the twentieth century demands of patriotic sons and daughters of
the nations in their struggle upward toward the realisation of the ideal state.69
The familistic idea of the home as a resource in this fight was also underpinned by a nationalistic subtext. The home, the people and the nation were woven into a normative ideal, as a contrast to the abuse of alcohol but also as its potential casualty. A contemporary movement—hygienism—brought the essentials of this thinking together.

Hygienism

There was widespread concern at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century over the degenerating impact of the modern society on the population. Public health, in a wide sense, emerged as an answer to this problem, and physicians were the guarantors for its maintenance. As the consequences on future generations became a key issue, the alcohol problem, too, was placed in a larger context. The anti-alcohol conferences made it clear on repeated occasions that the human race was growing weaker because of alcohol: it was worse-equipped in many respects, because the sins of one generation impaired the chances of the generation to come. In the 1907 conference in Stockholm a professor Laitinen maintained that this was true at least of an animal population but he was less sure whether this also applied to humans. At the next conference, in London in 1909, he could confirm that it did.

But as early as 1895 a delegate of the British Medical Temperance Association had laid down that a person who misused alcohol became “gradually degraded through the stages which civilization, education, religion and experience have slowly raised him.” And as a manifestation of national self-conceit, the 1907 conference in Stockholm speculated on why people in northern Europe were stronger and had more vitality than those in the south of Europe. This was assumed to be the result of considerably lower levels of alcohol misuse over many generations. But in the mind of the future-oriented hygienist Bror Gadelius at the conference in Stockholm 1907, these were already degenerated times:

“...at Stockholm where we can still see the effects of this conflagration whose devastating consequences we can witness in the accumulated degeneration of many regions. A great many of our poor idiots and incurable madmen are the withering ruins of this great fire.”

Hygienism was a conceptual construct which could mean many things. Somewhat simplistically, it aimed to improve the population quality, while the means consisted of a host of measures, from improved sanitary conditions and more modern housing to spiritual education and racial biological selection. The conference proceedings make it clear that hygienism was a loose mix of metaknowledge which could accommodate—and legitimate—all kinds of demands. For example, calls for the shaping of character and moral fibre in the face of alcohol came to be discussed in terms of the hygiene of the I—Hygiene des Ich.

The hygienic movement made bold claims, and its thought structures were used, in the words of the sociologist Eva Palmblad, “to naturalise, rationalise the existence of a given order and to make certain social circumstances appear as natural.” Hygienism became both an explanatory and legitimating ideology to lean on when one made a choice between moderation and abstinence (“the preaching of moderation in the use of alcohol cannot be the correct aim of the hygienist”). The conferences show that hygienism could embrace the most...
different kinds of phenomena but also differing grades of severity: it was not only alcohol but also the use of tea and coffee which was not “quite in accordance with the strictest principles of hygiene.” Hygienism accommodated both public health objectives of conventional medicine and health ideas of alternative movements. Within the German gesündere leben movement, for example, one encountered again such phenomena as natural therapy, physical culture, vegetarianism and nudism. This life reform movement strove for an improved quality of life that could be backed by large sections of the middle class. Some delegates in the anti-alcohol conferences would at times make explicit the link to such ideals, claiming that the vegetarian diet could cure and prevent the misuse of alcohol.

One can to a certain extent understand the success of medico-hygienic thinking as a consequence of increased medical knowledge, but the perspective shift also needs to be seen against the backdrop of more overall societal processes where, for instance, the efforts of the temperance movement to ground its battle in scientific thought were one of the reasons why medico-hygienic ideas came to occupy a more prominent place in the hygienic movement at large. The temperance question thus took place in a broader context of societal welfare and social relations. It was argued in the 1897 conference in Brussels that scientific positivism urgently needed to spread information not only about the physiological consequences but also about the repercussions on the social organism, “l’organisme social.”

**Racial Hygiene**

The notion of the people and the nation as a social organism made the collective into a morally compelling entity which mattered more than an individual’s welfare. This manifested itself especially clearly in the most radical variety of hygienic thought, racial hygiene. In many countries in Europe, as also in the United States, sections of the temperance movement found an ally in the eugenic movement. Hygienic thought contains the seed of that racial hygiene which would go on to produce its most hideous blooms after the period examined here. Still, the German gesündere leben movement was, for example, clearly compatible with ideas of selective breeding. Hygienism includes an idealising and aestheticizing current which can be seen in the racially and biologically objectified body and in the organised physical culture in many countries at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. For instance, we find this on the plaque that was handed out to the participants of the 1911 International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden (figure 1). This exhibition was also visited by Robert Hercod of the International Temperance Bureau.

Contemporary eugenic thought had not yet been put to the test; it was relatively inquiring. This is especially true if one compares it to the eugenic thinking of the interwar years. Some kind of loosely knitted theory of heredity was nevertheless on the agenda when the causes and consequences of alcohol misuse were to be explained in terms of degeneration. Such trains of thought lent scientific legitimacy in the battle against drinking but also more gravity when an individual’s alcohol consumption could be linked with the welfare of future generations and national well-being.

But this focus on heredity also challenged an older temperance paradigm which had rather departed from the significance of the social circumstances in the emergence of misuse. In the conferences, and depending on the speakers,
one could hear very different stresses being laid on the root causes of misuse, but there were also attempts to mediate between heredity and environment as well as a kind of Michurian theory of heredity which claimed that heredity could be influenced by such things as bad housing and poor diet.\textsuperscript{90} Michurian or Lamarckian interpretations were the theories of heredity most referred to at the conferences. Several presentations highlighted that alcohol destroyed not only the drinkers themselves but also their offspring: a substandard quality of sorts was expected to be hereditary.\textsuperscript{91} This is how alcohol use ceased to be an individual concern:

\begin{quote}
Inasmuch as the interests of the whole, that is, of the human race, must take precedence over those of the individual, an individual's sexual hygiene must subordinate itself to societal sexual hygiene and all the more so as sexual hygiene is first and foremost identical with racial hygiene.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

Alcohol would kill the individual and destroy the race—“mort de l’individu et déchéance de la race.”\textsuperscript{93} Alcohol would lead to degeneration and in the end become “a racial illness which is antisocial as it brings down the morals of a
nation, encourages impure pleasures and is the enemy of pure enjoyment. This image of an impending racial war, if not literally then through evolutionary contest, intensified the fateful gravity of the question. At the 1905 conference, noted race biologist Auguste Forel spoke of an eastern threat—“schwarze Wolken sammeln sich am östlichen Horizont”—and that the white race was threatened.

The races were differently endowed—strong and weak, superior and inferior (“überwertige und minderwertige”)—depending on the different characteristics. Then there was the modern problem of degeneration in which a race was debilitated by such cultural phenomena as alcoholism, excess and sexual debauchery. The answer was racial hygiene.

The link with racial hygiene did not point to an immediately obvious direction. The Lamarckian mode of thought also allowed investment in favourable social conditions as a response to the problem of degeneration. Nor was alcohol a self-evident foe when the discussion tackled negative eugenics. There were debates in Great Britain, for instance, on the possibility of letting alcohol help to eliminate inferior individuals. In this light, all efforts to curb the misuse of alcohol were seen as disturbing desirable natural selection. This response was, however, rejected by Auguste Forel, who in the 1901 conference in Vienna pointed out that this would mean that the old civilised races could now take their alcohol much better than the uncivilised races who had not drunk previously. This was not true. Alcohol misuse was not confined to the procreating section of the population, either, as it could also announce its presence after childbearing age. It was for these reasons that alcohol misuse could not be used to achieve a favourable natural selection. Instead, alcohol consumption needed to be changed for the good of mankind.

As opposed to interwar years, sterilization—forced or otherwise—was rarely advocated as an answer to the alcohol problem. But the international conferences brought together delegates from many countries with different experiences. In the United States, the first draft law on forced sterilization was introduced as early as 1897 in the state of Michigan. It then took ten years for the first law to come into force (in Indiana), and eight states had passed some kind of sterilization laws by 1912. The historian Mark A. Largent has convincingly shown that this early wave of sterilizations can be coupled with the influential American Progressivism movement. Similar socio-utopian modes of thought can be found in many countries, Sweden included.

The first National Conference on Race Betterment, held in Michigan in 1914, had an entire session to discuss the alcohol and tobacco problem. There were thus manifest links between the anti-alcohol movement and the eugenic movement, but the anti-alcohol conferences did not at the time debate sterilization as a plausible response to the alcohol problem. Extremely long periods at alcoholism treatment institutions could stop unwanted procreation, but it was also deemed to be a costly alternative. In many instances the reasoning amounted to no more than taking some kind of “steady common sense at the procreation.” It was unclear whether good qualities should be favoured (positive eugenics) or bad ones checked (negative eugenics). The problematic was rooted in a social order that had precluded natural selection:

Thanks to medicine, humanity and individual hygiene, this selection has for the most part ceased. Quite the opposite, a mass of wretched life forms are kept alive, while the sane and sound are used as cannon fodder or as overworked slaves.
What remained was “artificial selection,” which would be aimed not only at “health and intelligence but most of all at industriousness, ethical and social feelings, and cheery optimism.”

Modernity and Science

The alcohol problem that was formulated during the nineteenth century emerged at the intersection of recognisably increased drinking and new expectations being placed on the citizens of the modern society. The latter factor was in all probability decisive: also when the per capita alcohol consumption stayed constant, the striving for a population of “health, intelligence, industriousness, ethical and social feelings, and cheery optimism” had contributed to constructing alcohol consumption as a problem to be solved. It was not an end in itself to fight the misuse of alcohol. The fight against alcohol rather took place (and to an increasing degree at the time examined) as part of a fight for the modern society—and starting from the premises of what this society demanded from its citizens in the name of progress and efficiency. Individual health was a collective concern, which was evident in, for example, the increased collaboration between life assurance companies and physicians. The anti-alcohol conferences also included presentations on how the insurance companies were to deal with consumers of alcohol, and statistical calculations of life expectancy among drinkers and teetotallers.

Industrialization made alcohol misuse more visible in the poorer urban areas, and temperance work consisted in great part of disciplining the working class. The link between drinking and disorderly conduct raised among the propertied classes the worst-case scenario of a revolution. If nothing else, the hedonistic drinking habits were a direct opposite to orderly and entrepreneurial life. One can therefore argue as Weber did that the more ascetic ideal of the temperance movement acted as a means of spreading “the spirit of capitalism.” Alcohol habits need to be reinterpreted in light of the new working life demands and against the fact that alcohol use obstructed industrial and economic efficiency. This development can be followed on the national level, where new legislation and control mechanisms went hand in hand with the advances of the industrial society but it is also visible on a very concrete level in that Henry Ford, for example, advocated a total ban on alcohol as a manifestation of what the philosopher Antonio Gramsci has read as an attempt to impose hegemonic power on the factory itself. The American temperance movement and the Anti-Saloon League in particular were obviously popular among the big companies.

Working life was clearly an arena for the temperance cause. In the nineteenth century, the conferences debated the forced drinking—Trinkzwang—which was still a burden on some occupations (and student life). Working culture could in other words be a threat to the anti-alcohol battle, while the anti-alcohol battle was also the prerequisite of an efficient working life in the future: “Clear heads and steady hands are needed in all the places of industrial pursuit.” Still, it was not only working life but leisure, too, which appeared on the agenda when several conference presentations dealt with the role of the coffee houses in temperance work at the end of the nineteenth century. These had organised in the National Coffee Tavern Association in England in the
1870s, which shows that organising was seen as a necessity and that the decision could not be placed in the hands of the clients and the market.

Legislation was a response to the state’s apprehensions and ambitions, but the fears were expressed most clearly in the debate on the place of alcohol in the state’s core functions. The importance of sobriety on the railway was a recurring theme, but the foremost of the state’s jobs was war. Here, the alcohol problem could partly be seen as a problem of degeneration when the alcohol-damaged offspring were not good enough to fight, partly as another kind of problem when the drunken soldiers could not do battle particularly effectively. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, alcohol was debated in the armed forces as causing problems of discipline, illness and generally speaking poor performance. Modern warfare wanted sober soldiers. This was a costly lesson which according to Auguste Forel and others the Russians had learnt in the war of 1905 against the sober Japanese.

The period examined here coincides with the last tremors of many great empires. The Russian, German, Habsburg and Ottoman empires all fell in the wake of the First World War. But during the preceding decades there was rapid imperial expansion, most of all in the colonising of Africa. The Berlin Conference where the colonial powers laid down the boundaries for future African colonization, among other things, closed the same year as the anti-alcohol conferences began, in 1885. Alcohol was a key instrument of trade with the colonies and their exploitation, so the transnational temperance movement acquired a new arena to take care of. In certain questions, argues Schrad, one used a set of “temperance frames for understanding significant international political developments,” as in 1889, for example, when the conference resolution in Brussels banned both the slave trade and liquor traffic. This was seen as a great victory for the temperance cause. The 1893 conference called slavery and intemperance “the twin oppressors of the people.” But alcohol—so one maintained in the 1890 conference in Brussels—was worse for Africa than the slave trade had ever been:

The slave trade takes people away out of the country. The drink destroys their soul and body in it, and through the principles of heredity destroys coming generations’ body and soul.

The conferences examined in this study were concerned about the increased alcohol trade in Africa as a result of colonialism. According to Tyrrell, the “supply of alcohol became a touchstone for wider anxieties over colonialism’s oppressions.” In 1886, one year after the Berlin Conference, the British temperance movement arranged a conference to manage the colonial liquor trade. The issues were by no means unconnected: with the possession of these areas came also the responsibility for their civilization. The 1887 conference in Zurich linked the battle against alcohol with the white man’s burden: how could one civilise the natives if one at the same time provided them with copious amounts of alcohol and guns? This was a shameful development—“ein Schandfleck”—for the Christian civilization. The superiority of the white race entailed a moral responsibility, for “the primitive peoples [were] like children, adopted by the white peoples, who had taken on the responsibility to raise them when they had seized the power over these peoples.”
Africa opened up to European trade and European civilization, which meant that one had to take charge of the future development. “Is this European invasion to be fraught with good or evil to the native races?” asked Josias Grant Mills, a delegate of the Church of England Temperance Society and the Native Races Committee at the 1890 conference in Christiania. We may glimpse an underlying critique of a more general nature as regards the colonization of Africa, but the situation now called for beneficial measures in order “to improve the condition of these countries, to carry blessings and not curses to them.” According to the Brussels agreement in 1891, the alcohol trade in Africa would be limited, but the 1907 conference in Stockholm still expressed a great concern about alcohol misuse in Africa. This was now a large question. As a special theme the conference discussed the alcohol problem among various native populations, also among the Swedish Sami, for example. The development in Africa was still morally reprehensible but it also did not make economic sense, as one needed the black labour force to extract the African riches. The white colonisers did not have what it took to work in the tropical climate, so a sober native population was extremely important for the division of labour. The coloniser’s “work must, to achieve results, confine itself to direction and supervision; he is the head and the intelligence, and the natives are the arms which shall carry out the work itself.”

This analysis of how “drunkenness impairs the negro’s working capacity” was also heard in other contributions to this conference.

Criticism of Modernity

The period examined here covers the breakthrough to modernity when new communications, popular movements, industrialization, urbanization and democratization left their mark on the western societies. The anti-alcohol conferences articulated the alcohol problem as part of this change whether the problem entailed the importance of a sober railway personnel or women’s new citizenship. At the same time, however, modernity carried a kind of critique which did not see alcohol in terms of a hindrance to progress but rather viewed the problem as a consequence of modern progress. Two sides of the same coin perhaps? As historian of ideas Gunnar Broberg and historian Mattias Tydén have argued, one can consider this a dual modernity which applauds science and engineering but also cultivates a critique of civilization. Racial hygiene was among those constructs which satisfied both needs and it is also in this context that one can explain the German life reformers movement.

The anti-alcohol conferences tackled the theme in its many manifestations. The degenerating effects of cities were contrasted with the natural countryside, which is why it was seen as particularly worrying if drinking occurred in the (German) countryside, the “well of youth” of the future and the race. The causes for the misuse of alcohol were found, for example, in the rapid scientific progress and in the ubiquitous industrial machines. This was an unnatural condition and this was also why the alcohol problem, according to an American conference delegate, was larger in the United States than in Europe. American life was more “unreal, more unnatural.”

The criticism of modern destitution also contained the answer: social want was on many occasions given as the cause rather than the consequence of much alcohol consumption. The battle against alcohol misuse then came to resemble general
social policy, turning into a battle for shorter working hours and improved housing conditions. “The motivation of an individual’s sobriety in our time is social,” maintained the physician Knut Kjellberg in the Stockholm conference in 1907. This perspective was purposely contrasted with a view of the alcohol problem as a medical question. The causes were rather located within a wider context:

The housing question, long working hours and the more or less exhausting impact that many jobs have on the nervous system, the quality of nourishment and the provision of meals, family life, education at home and school, efforts to provide adult education, cultural recreation.

But there were also those who found fault with the symptom-theoretical perspective. According to them, the widespread drinking among the upper classes hardly implied that the drinking was due to social ills. Also, those who premised their analysis on Marxist thought cast suspicion on that part of the labour movement who were convinced that improved social conditions would solve the alcohol problem. From a socialist vantage point, it was therefore important to highlight the structural circumstances and at the same time condemn drunkenness as such. It was pointed out on repeated occasions in the conferences that alcohol could be both the cause and consequence of poor social circumstances.

Science and Ideology

In Schrad’s analysis, the early anti-alcohol conferences represent resources in the political battle for sobriety and for prohibition on the national and perhaps also on the global level. Schrad argues that “transnational advocacy networks” operated through the conferences and that these associations were something else than “epistemic communities” in their nature. Epistemic communities were “international networks of professionals and experts who are bound by shared causal ideas and technical information as a foundation to influence national policy decisions.” These communities, Schrad holds, “shared scientific and cognitive understandings,” whereas transnational advocacy networks were “motivated primarily by shared normative understandings of complex social phenomena.”

This distinction helps Schrad to establish that epistemic communities are only loosely connected to the political process, while transnational advocacy networks “actively seek social and political change based primarily on shared understandings of right versus wrong and good versus evil.”

I believe that Schrad’s division is misleading. No doubt the anti-alcohol battle around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century was a moral battle, often with Christian overtones, but I think it would be a mistake to picture this as clearly opposed to a more scientific and dispassionate view of the alcohol problem. As previous research has shown, a scientific rendering of a question can also contribute to a de-ideologization of sorts which enables a stronger political mobilization in various questions. It is a fact that this objective of a scientific approach permeated many of the themes discussed in the anti-alcohol conferences. For example, if the late nineteenth-century theories on degeneration appear as imbued with a moral tone, one should perhaps rather understand that they were so popular at this time precisely because they appeared secular and scientific. And the American Anti-Saloon League, a union which rather resembled the morally and politically active organs which Schrad recognised in the
transnational advocacy networks, operated purposely—by collaborating with the Scientific Temperance Federation, for example—in order to be seen as objective and scientific. The powerful Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, too, sought to influence already at the end of the 1800s by educational materials where the alcohol question was illustrated with scientific arguments.

At the time, one would increasingly refer to the various branches of science to describe the alcohol problem and to come up with answers. The prestigious position of science and medicine obviously came to have an impact on the work around the temperance question—linguistically, strategically and methodologically—when, as Baumohl and Room characterise the changing nature of alcoholic treatment in the mid-1910s, “the secularization of truth associated with the rising esteem of science undermined the voluntary, quasireligious tradition.”

But, as the historian David Harley has noted, in order to explain a problem in medical terms, for example, one needed to be able to connect it to the “core beliefs of a substantial group.” This makes the fracture between a moral-religious and medico-scientific interpretation less obvious. Previous research on scientific alcohol studies at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century has also shown that scientific facts were mixed with the researchers’ personal biases, and it is clear in the context of the anti-alcohol conferences, too, that the scientific description hardly revolutionised the work. Quite the opposite, the scientific observations were rather seen as anticipated corroboration of those principles that the temperance movement had long relied on and battled for. Common themes such as temperance education were approached from the scientific perspective as an opportunity to boost the effect with the help of scientific arguments.

It was not unheard of that one could also raise doubts in the late nineteenth century about science which all too often produced conflicting positions. This is where the moral approach found its defenders, as it was “of infinitely greater importance than the scientific aspect.” Still, to be able to deliver a study which was “fully in accord with advanced scientific thought on this subject” was always a bonus. The conferences dealt with such writing of history as advocated an ever increasing degree of scientific involvement when religious and ethical motives were being replaced with scientific research. The 1907 conference in Stockholm sought to be nothing less than a scientific conference which could seriously discuss the scientific subject of “alcohology.” The programme was therefore split into a scientific and a more public-oriented section. Prince Gustaf Adolf opened the conference, laying it down in his opening address that it was now “scientifically proven” that alcohol led to misery. The honorary president Sixten von Friesen similarly underlined that the question would now be solved scientifically. In the next conference, in London in 1909, one could confirm a particular kind of historical writing, which showed a “continual growth of the scientific spirit,” and an earmarked session of medicine stressed the medical perspective in the matter.

The Disease Concept

A specific aspect in the scientific nature of the alcohol question was the medical interpretation of copious alcohol consumption as an illness. The official history of the International Council on Alcohol and Alcoholism (ICAA) describes this as a shift of perspective in conjunction with the first conference after
the Second World War, in 1948, “which recognized alcohol as a medical, moral, and social problem and expressed the wish that in every country alcoholism be considered a disease.”\footnote{166} But the question of the pathological status of alcohol misuse is far older than this and can be traced back to such influences as the late eighteenth-century studies by the American physician Benjamin Rush; the early nineteenth-century British physician Thomas Trotter; and the accounts of the Swedish doctor Magnus Huss in the mid-1800s.\footnote{167} The historian Jessica Warner has gone as far as locating the first reports of alcohol misuse as an illness in the early part of the seventeenth century.\footnote{168}

Towards the end of the nineteenth century in Britain, one promoted the concept of illness as an alternative to the dated moralistic notion. According to the British historian Virginia Berridge, this was about “a strongly physicalist concept of disease” which at the same time matched “the professional strategies of a wide range of middle-class groupings in society.”\footnote{169} Still, while alcohol misuse could be seen as an illness, there also appeared a clear and lingering resistance to such a notion in the medical spheres themselves.\footnote{170} Several medical articles were published in the mid-1800s which extolled the virtues of alcohol both as a food-stuff and as a medicine. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that one could note a more distinct opposition to using alcohol in medical care.\footnote{171} The anti-alcohol conferences of 1885–1913 criticised the all too liberal use of alcohol as a therapeutic preparation in medical treatment, and several speakers reported that special temperance hospitals had been established to provide medical care without alcohol.\footnote{172}

The interpretation of alcohol misuse as an illness obviously made those physicians who were involved in the temperance cause dissociate themselves from providing treatment by way of alcohol, but the notion of illness also correlated with the idea that big problems must be grounded in substantial causes. As a physician put it in the 1897 conference in Brussels: alcoholism must have an exceptionally deep root cause, “une cause originelle profonde, exceptionnelle.”\footnote{173} The link to a human being’s physical constitution satisfied this need for a deeper and uniform cause. According to the president of the British Society for the Study of Inebriety, Norman Kerr, inebriety was “a disease of the nervous system allied to insanity” and an “abnormal condition, in which morbid cravings and impulses to intoxication are apt to be developed in such force as to overpower the moral resistance and control.”\footnote{174} When characterised in these terms, the notion of an illness was obviously a distinct alternative to moralising interpretations.

In Christiania in 1890, Kerr named this illness as “narcomania” and said that it could occur periodically or constantly, and that the periodical nature could be due to a host of factors ranging from weather to access to money.\footnote{175} Constant inebriety would lead to “tissue-degeneration of the brain” which then led to “perverted cravings and impulses for intoxication.”\footnote{176} Even more basic causes for the initial misuse of alcohol included “[h]eredity, especially, of inebriety but sometimes of insanity.”\footnote{177} This predisposing constitution could lead to topical alcohol misuse as a result of a great many social circumstances:

The existing causes are often to be found in some form of nerve-chock, such as from financial business or domestic trouble, disappointment or bereavement; in head and other diseases and injuries; in certain occupations which exhaust rapidly the nervous energy; in overwork or idleness; in monotonous dullness and
in association; and in intoxicating agents themselves, alcohol being a potent inebriate excitant.\textsuperscript{178}

The particular reason was important, as one could cure the drinker by identifying the cause: “Find out what has driven him, if you wish to effect a cure.”\textsuperscript{179}

As Mariana Valverde has convincingly shown, the notion of illness never really took root during this period, not in the United States and Great Britain at least, and certainly not in the actual treatment.\textsuperscript{180} But several conference presentations from the late nineteenth century nevertheless referred to alcohol misuse as an illness. Alcohol had “a special tendency so to alter the nervous system as to create a desire for the daily repetition of the dose.”\textsuperscript{181} According to writer Gallus Thomann at the 1893 conference in The Hague, the United States had long ago already “adopted the Rush theory that drunkenness is a disease and should be treated as such.”\textsuperscript{182} The notion of alcohol misuse as an illness was not an empirical given, but an agreement with its own therapeutic and administrative consequences. The American Association for the Study and Cure of Inebriety had, for example, decided in 1887 on a set of principles the first of which laid down that “[i]nебriety is a disease,” followed by: “It is as curable as other diseases are.”\textsuperscript{183} The illness could be “inherited or acquired; but the disease is usually induced by the habitual use of alcohol or other narcotic substances.”\textsuperscript{184} The battle on the definition was clear in this conference presentation from 1893 where the speaker maintained that “it is the duty of the civil authorities to recognize inebriety as a disease, and to provide means in hospitals and asylums for its scientific treatment.”\textsuperscript{185} This determination about the medical status of alcohol misuse manifested itself on other occasions, too. A presentation in 1899 argued that this was a “mental and sometimes bodily disease.”\textsuperscript{186} The 1907 conference made a plea for the misusers to be treated as ill and drunkenness to be seen as an illness, while in London in 1909 R. W. Branthwaite argued that this was a question of treating people “whose condition demands the application of measures similar to those applied to cases of recognised infectious disease.”\textsuperscript{187}

The Alcohol Question on the Verge of Modernity

The alcohol question, such as it was discussed in the anti-alcohol conferences of 1885–1913, was both homogeneous and disparate. The conference delegates agreed on and departed from the premise that alcohol was destructive; they sought to tackle this serious question in different ways and successfully discussed a great many subjects. If one were to pick an overarching theme for the entire period, one could describe it as an arrangement for the modern state where the temperance movement placed itself in the service of the state and at the same time demanded that it be given some responsibility for the future development. But these temperance advocates were not content with trying to make the old authoritarian state see things more soberly. The temperance movement was in great part a radical force with liberal and socialist overtones.\textsuperscript{188} The authorities in Russia, for example, were deeply dubious about the radical temperance movement which was considered to threaten the imperial order—and it was therefore a surprise to many that it should be Russia which was the first country to introduce prohibition in 1914.\textsuperscript{189} The battle against the alcohol capital was also an early formation of political activity and class consciousness.\textsuperscript{190}
The situation looked very different from one country to the other. According to Baumohl and Room, the temperance movement retained strong links to the progressive forces in the Nordic countries, while in the United States it rather allied itself with conservative forces towards the end of the nineteenth century (and was something of a spent force in Great Britain). But the anti-alcohol conferences kept discussing the temperance question with political overtones. One speaker argued in 1897 that anarchy and other antisocial movements represented a moral perversion and were the result of alcoholism, but it was more common to connect the fight for sobriety to a more general political battle for welfare and influence. The socialists were called upon to fight the battle of sobriety, as alcohol was “the chief factor in producing social inequality and suffering.” For its part, the alcohol industry exemplified the capital in which the product—alcohol—“enables a few to become rich while it impoverishes the very many.” In the 1901 conference in Vienna the labour movement and the temperance movement were urged to collaborate: the labour movement had to realise that the fight against alcohol was necessary in order for progress to be made in the social battle, whereas the temperance movement should understand that the fight for sobriety could be won only if it shared an ambition to improve the workers’ material conditions. Most parliamentarians of the labour movement were teetotallers, according to a representative of a British temperance organization United Kingdom Alliance, which proved that political influence could easily find an ally in sobriety. Women’s political participation similarly benefited from support from the temperance movement in several countries.

The decades before the First World War have been described as the heyday of confident internationalism, a period when knowledge, capital and political interest formations found allies across borders and hope was found in the collective rather than the narrow nation-state. It was in this spirit that the temperance movement took up its project. At the same time, these were years when the nation acted as a point of reference in several questions that were chafing within the modern project: population qualities and the condition of future generations, the notion of citizenship, industrial strength and competitiveness, the role and the strength of the state. Given the historical context of the alcohol question, it is interesting that the responses seem to centre on the very themes that appear entirely modern even more than a century later: treatment, prevention and restriction. This can mostly be regarded as the author’s creative inability to find new categories, but the responses nevertheless stand out as somewhat loosely connected—almost banal—when one considers the magnitude of the problem. Still, the states’ willingness, ability and legitimacy to force certain measures on the citizens in order to solve the problem points to vitalised governmental social political ambitions. The alcohol problem was now bound up with a kind of core in the self-image and purpose of the western nation. Alcohol was depicted as one of the great epidemics and hence also as a fundamental threat to the potential strength of the modern nation.

The transnational context of the conferences did not necessarily entail an internationally-minded community. Quite the opposite, this context was at least as frequently an arena for national examination and self-assertion. Obviously, as much then as it is now, it was also a manifestation of national limitations in politics. It was the population of one’s own nation, their education, hygiene, working and housing conditions that could be set against the demands of and on the state.
That nation which desired industrial competitiveness, an efficient infrastructure and a strong military institution also did well to ally itself with those temperance advocates who met at the transnational anti-alcohol conferences. The nation which had such objectives and wanted to see sober and strong citizens was encouraged also by the progressive forces in the temperance movement to take up a whole host of issues from women’s political status to an individual’s sex life. The fact that the alcohol question was made into a question for science was in this context a delicate resource: the problem could be lent that import its political formulation demanded, while the notion of an illness and the state’s alliance with the physicians allowed more or less drastic responses in the different countries. Notions of alcohol misuse as an illness and racial hygienic problem descriptions opened up for a dramatic reformulation of the alcohol-consuming individual’s role in the modern state—consequences that would make themselves known only after the investigated period.

The 1913 conference in Milan was in many respects similar to the previous conferences. Most questions turned up again; we can recognise the problem descriptions and proposed responses. These questions had been discussed for almost 30 years, and to a certain extent, one had also seen some of the responses tried out and tested in the different countries. The foremost response—a total ban on the sale of alcohol—was yet to be realised. The conference closed on September 28, 1913. In exactly ten months’ time the First World War broke out. Then everything changed.

Endnotes
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5. N. S. Davis, “Is there any causative or etiological relation between the extensive use of alcoholic drinks and the constituted increase of epilepsy, imbecility and insanity, both mental and moral in all the countries of Europe and America?” in CP 1899.
22. Sulkunen and Warpenius, “Reforming the self and the other,” 430.


32. Agnes E. Slack, “Kvinnan och nykterhetsfrågan,” in CP 1907a, 123.


34. Mr. and Mrs. Bramwell Booth, “Alcohol in relation to the home,” in CP 1909, 125.


40. Berridge, “The origins and early years of the society 1884–1899.”


56. See, for instance: Birgit Petersson, Den farliga underklassen. Studier i fattigdom och brottsslighet i 1800-talets Sverige (Umeå, 1983); Svenbjörn Kilander, Den nya staten och den


61. Curt Wallis, “Skolan och alkoholfrågan,” in CP 1907a, 49


66. Sulkunen and Warpenius, “Reforming the self and the other.”


68. James H. Kellog, “What employers may do to lessen the ravages of strong drinks,” in CP 1890, 163.


71. Broberg and Tydén, Oönskade i folkhemmet; Berridge, “Prevention and social hygiene 1900–1914.”


74. Dr Lidström, “Historiens lärdomar i alkoholfrågan,” in CP 1907a.


76. Dr Gruber, “Die Hygiene des Ich,” in CP 1905.

77. Eva Palmblad, Medicinen som samhällsdåra (Göteborg, 1990), 13.
78. Alice Vickery Drysdale, “Total abstinence and moderation,” in CP 1899, 603.
84. Sulkunen and Warpenius, “Reforming the self and the other.”
85. Fritzen, Geständer Leben.
94. Dr Legrain, “Alkohol och degeneration; rashygien,” in CP 1907a, 70.
100. Brauer, “Eroticizing Lamarckian eugenics.”


113. Sulkunen and Warpenius, Reforming the self and the other,” 426.


115. Tyrrell, Reforming the World.


118. Kellogg, “What employers may do to lessen the ravages of strong drinks,” 165. The Hygiene Movement also presented the labouring body as a desirable ideal of the new age (Anthea Callen, “Man or machine: ideals of the labouring male body and the aesthetics of industrial production in early twentieth-century Europe,” in Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti, eds. Fae Brauer and Anthea Callen (Ashgate, 2008), 139–161).


124. Lynn Pan, Alcohol in Colonial Africa (Helsinki, 1975).

125. Schrad, The Prohibition Option, 142.

126. Leigh, “La collaboration de la Presse,” 185.


128. Tyrrell, Reforming the World, 131.


131. J. Grant Mills, “The demoralization of native races by the liquor traffic,” in CP 1890, 168.
137. Broberg and Tydén, Oönskade i folkhemmet; Fritzen, Gesùnder Leben.
140. Crothers, “Inebriate asylums in America,” 128.
150. This point is also made on the tobacco question by Matthew Hilton and Simon Nightingale, “‘A microbe of the Devil’s own make’: Religion and science in the British anti-tobacco movement, 1853–1908,” in Ashes to Ashes. The History of Smoking and Health, eds. S. Lock, L. A. Reynolds and E. M. Tansey (Amsterdam, 1998), 41–75.
153. Opdycke Lamme, “Alcoholic dogs and glory for all.”


155. Berridge, “Prevention and social hygiene 1900–1914.”


160. Wakely, “The education of children in temperance principles”; Wakely, “Primary schools and Bands of Hope as a means of preventing intemperance.”


175. Kerr, “How to deal with inebriates,” 152.


177. Kerr, “How to deal with inebriates,” 152.


190. Sulkunen and Warpenius, “Reforming the self and the other.”


197. Ch. Gray, “Le rôle électoral des femmes au point de vue de la tempérance,” in CP 1899.