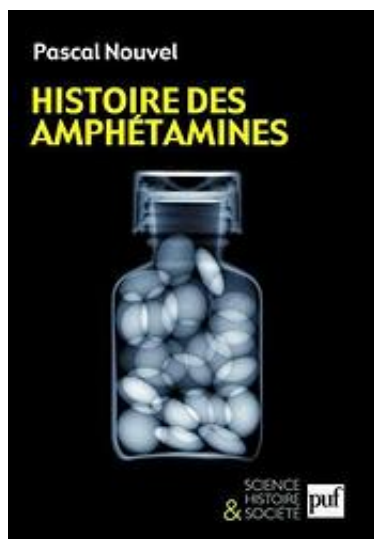


## Pascal Nouvel's Histoire des Amphétamines

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By Todd Meyers



[Histoire des Amphétamines](#)

Pascal Nouvel  
Presses Universitaires de France, 2009  
320 pages  
€ 19.00 (Paperback)

*Reviewed by Todd Meyers, Wayne State University*

The following review has two caveats. First, [Pascal Nouvel's Histoire des Amphétamines](#) (History of Amphetamines) is in French. Second, the review falls into the category of “book note” rather than a proper book review, but for the sake of drawing attention to a truly impressive piece of scholarship, here goes.

Pascal Nouvel is a philosopher and biologist whose books include [Conversation avec mon clone sur la passion amoureuse](#) (PUF, 2002) and [L'art d'aimer la science](#) (PUF, 2000), with a preface by the Nobel Prize laureate, [François Jacob](#). In this, his most recent book, Nouvel offers an historical and philosophical account of amphetamine. Rather than tracing out a detailed social, legal, and medical history of amphetamines, something Nouvel acknowledges has been done with some precision by [Nicolas Rasmussen](#) in [On Speed: The Many Lives of Amphetamines](#) (New York University Press, 2008), he shows how the transformation of the human subject is integral to the history of substances. Nouvel tells a story that links the modification of chemical compounds with transformations of thought concerning psychoactive substances. In his introduction, Nouvel writes, “Ce livre ne raconte pas l’histoire d’un homme ou d’une nation, ni celle d’un concept ou d’une classe sociale, mais l’histoire d’une substance, l’histoire d’un groupe d’atomes liés entre eux par des liaisons chimiques, l’histoire d’une molécule.” Nouvel casts amphetamine in the central role of its own history.

**AMA citation**

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