

## Book Reviews

F. KRÄUPL TAYLOR, *The concepts of illness, disease and morbus*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. ix, 131, £6.50.

Taylor's short, elegant book is not primarily historical. Instead, it is a work based on philosophical and logical analysis, proceeding cumulatively like a well-constructed textbook by means of definitions. Some reference is made to Sydenham, selected as the clearest exponent of the ontological theory of disease, and particularly to Virchow, whom Taylor sees as having most influence on the modern "reactive" theories of disease. Given that the author chose this underpinning for his argument, it is perhaps permissible to refer him to the work of Walter Pagel, especially on Jahn and Virchow (*Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1945, 18: 1–43). Although careful to moderate his definitions where necessary (for example, "the empirical class of patients is an inexact class with blurred boundaries" – p. 71), Taylor's style of argument belongs to linguistic philosophy. It is not incompatible with the binary approach demanded by computers and more uncritically supplied by some present-day analysts whom he is concerned to correct. This mode of thought is also evident in some of his historical illustrations, for example his reference to the "crucial" synthesis of urea. In content Taylor allies himself with those who welcome the era of molecular biology because the physics on which it depends can now avoid scientific determinism and give scope to free will.

Of the terms used in the title, Taylor regards "illness" (clinical manifestations) as being necessary to complement the narrowed, "Virchovian" definition of "disease" as exclusively a configuration of pathological abnormalities. "Morbus" is the term suggested by the author to unite both. Taylor accepts the limitations of modern scientific medicine ("most morbi . . . are only taxonomic entities whose casual derivation is merely partially known and therefore polygenic" – p. 117) but looks to the future establishment of monogenic entities even, and especially, in the field of psychiatry to which he has himself belonged. He is critical of the distinction between functional disorders and organic diseases, for which he holds Virchow partly responsible, although he reserves real disapproval for the reflex theories of Pavlov and Freud. The climax of Taylor's argument is his expectation that "cryptogenic morbi" will increasingly resolve themselves into proteinopathies, thereby removing all grounds of distinction between psychiatric or neurological, and other forms of disease.

Taylor thus belongs firmly to one side of the traditional structure and function debate. Like many earlier twentieth-century philosophical biologists he tends towards an equation of epistemology with the scientific method, and places great emphasis on the casual mode of explanation. His book has been made clear and comprehensible with the medical profession in mind, but his hope is that medicine is reducible to biology and ultimately to the molecules of modern physics. He is only typical of his predecessors in deploring stress on functional or environmental explanations as leading to the intrusion of emotion and politics into scholarly debate.

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BERYL ROWLAND (editor), *Medieval woman's guide to health: the first English gynecological handbook*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, 8vo, pp. xvii, 192, illus., £10.95.

This edition of a fifteenth-century English and Latin "Trotula" handbook, with a facing-page translation and lengthy introduction, is a seductively slick and lavishly illustrated production, whose extravagant claims for itself do not bear close examination.

Although on p. xvi and elsewhere, we are promised publication "in its entirety for the first time", of Sloane 2463, "an English Trotula manuscript", this book is no such thing. Sloane 2463 is a collection of four texts, copied in the same or similar hands, and all glossed by the same sixteenth-century hand. It contains Dr. Rowland's treatise, an antidotary, a practice of surgery, and longest, an anatomy, directed explicitly to surgeons. All together the four doubtless make up a guide for general surgery, which may explain why it belonged to Richard Ferris, Master of the Barber-Surgeons' Company, and Sergeant Surgeon to Elizabeth I. When the manuscript is considered as a whole, then, it is difficult to see how Dr. Rowland's little

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treatise shows that “women’s sicknesses were women’s business”, or that “women were the sole obstetricians” (pp. xv–xvi). Indeed, that a surgical manual would contain a gynaecological handbook, complete with illustrations of various foetal presentations, suggests the opposite.

The claim that this is “the first English gynecological handbook” wants qualification also, as similar works, entirely in Latin and containing much the same material as this, can be found in England as early as the thirteenth century.

The serious reader will want more information about previous scholarship on the manuscript than Rowland provides. J. H. Aveling, who, after all, did discover MS.2463 and publish an important part of it in 1874, deserves more than a brief condemnation for the incomplete nature of his work and his supposed antifeminism. The only footnote he receives is to another publication not containing his transcription. Even a male chauvinist merits a correct bibliographical entry, but Dr. Aveling’s pioneering work does not get this (for vol. 14 read 2).

If the reader does manage to discover Dr. Aveling’s article from Rowland’s meagre clues, he may well wonder why she fails to reckon with two of his major points: that the “Trotula” text (as she calls it) is part of a longer surgical work, i.e. MS.2463; and that most of it is a translation of the Latin of Roger of Parma, often verbatim. This latter is an important fact, to Middle English scholarship if not particularly to the author’s trendy feminism.

Rowland can also be taken to task for the dismal quality of her translation and transcription. Time after time, the sense of the text is distorted by rudimentary errors. A few examples: On p. 62, “bries” is not “water” or “urine”, but Middle English “breu”, meaning “eyebrow”, or “eyelid” (as a glance at Roger’s Latin would have revealed). P. 94 and elsewhere, “mete oyle” is “meat (olive) oil”, not “suitable oil”. On p. 108, keep MS. “ypericon”, which is “hypericum”, a medicinal plant, and not an error for the elsewhere unattested “empiricon”. P. 80, the MS. has “mumie”, which is a kind of gum, not “munne”. P. 134, “yf she conceyued in the fyrst of the twelue yeres” means “if she first conceived before the age of twelve”, not “if this is the first time that she has conceived for twelve years”. P. 152, “sillicie fetide” is not “fetid salt” (?), but “cotula fetida”, a flower. On the next page, “fomentatio” is “fomentation”, not “fermentation”. On p. 156, “*cor tangentis emollit*” does not mean “it weakens the pleasure of touching”, but “it (an antiaphrodisiac) makes the heart of the one who is touching gentle”; nor, on p. 158, does “*desiderium coitus et pollucionem*” mean “lasciviousness and the desire for intercourse”, but “desire for intercourse and masturbation”. The list need not end here.

The transcription contains many inconsistencies, particularly in the expansion of ambiguous contractions and in the citing of marginalia. Why some of the marginal notes added to the MS. by the rubricator are included by the editor and some are silently ignored, is never explained.

In a field as underexplored as medieval English medicine, any book attempting to give insight to both specialist and non-specialist is bound to enter into an accepted canon. The casual reader will no doubt be both entertained and informed by this book’s lively prose and illustrations; but, beware, this is a house built on sand.

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BETTY COWELL and DAVID WAINWRIGHT. *Behind the blue door. The history of the Royal College of Midwives 1881–1981*, London, Bailliere Tindall, 1981, 8vo, pp. 111, illus., £2.50 (paperback).

To write the history of an institution which spans a whole century in the space of eighty-eight pages is a difficult task. To do it well, the author must set the story against the changing political, economic, and social context, explaining key events in relation to the power of political and professional pressure groups, the ruling social and moral codes, and the organization of government.

This book, unfortunately, largely fails in this task. The role of the College, or Midwives’ Institute, as it then was, in the struggle for a Midwives Act is sketchily and unreliably dealt with. (Opticians were *not* registered in 1890, but 1958.) Major conflicts are ignored. We are not told that one section of the medical profession hostile to midwives sought their restrictive