

They arrive at a radical thesis: that a single humanitarian objective—the condemnation of slavery—energized Darwin’s evolutionism. They propose that his thinking about evolution derived in large part from an urge to prove that all races of mankind were joined genealogically and therefore had equal ethical status; that consanguinity demanded common decency. Darwin’s main interest, almost obsession, was to explain racial variation in a way that confounded the polygenist’s assertion of separate creations. And in so doing, it is claimed, he arrived at the idea of sexual selection as a means of explaining the racial characteristics (such as skin colour) so important to the polygenists. For Darwin, these reflected local aesthetic preferences that predominated due to the force of sexual selection. They were emphatically not evidence of distinct origins.

This hypothesis, say Desmond and Moore, explains many of the oddities of *The descent*, in particular its failure to say much about the fossil evidence for human evolution. Only if we see the book as inspired by abolitionist sensibilities can we account for why the discussion of human evolution from bestial progenitors was so half-heartedly compiled. Desmond and Moore also use Darwin’s hatred of slavery to help explain his delay in publishing *The origin*, his omission from it of his own species, and the vehemence with which he defended sexual selection. *The descent*, then, was in essence a contribution to a debate that James Cowles Prichard would have fully understood back in the 1830s. And for all his negative remarks about “savages”, in writing *The descent* Darwin drew upon a deep reservoir of radical humanitarianism which, for pragmatic reasons, he elected mostly to conceal from the reader.

Evaluating Desmond and Moore’s thesis is no easy matter; not least because—as indicated early in the piece—the authors provide just a summary of the claims and evidence which they plan to develop in more detail elsewhere. Even so, the point is well taken that we may have been too quick to dismiss the importance of Darwin’s horror at slavery in the genesis of his evolutionary theory. And it might well be that the second part of the book, *Selection in relation to*

sex, originated in Darwin’s attempt to find a means of explaining racial variation more congenial to his humanitarian beliefs. After all, few sights during the *Beagle* voyage affected him as deeply as seeing slaves in South America savagely flogged. And few issues so galvanized ethnological debate in the years of Darwin’s scientific coming of age than the relative status of “primitive” and “civilised” peoples. Yet on the evidence presented here, Desmond and Moore have not proved their case. That Darwin loathed slavery is certain. But in *The descent* and elsewhere he does not always write as a card-carrying humanitarian. Thus he could adopt a tone of near-indifference when talking of the extinction of some “primitive” races, and he was perfectly willing to employ standard tropes of the savage’s lack of reason when striving to fill the gap between apes and white Europeans. To be fair, Desmond and Moore argue that by the 1860s Darwin had lost some of his youthful egalitarianism. Still, it is not yet established that slavery was significantly more important than dozens of other factors in his earlier ruminations.

Nevertheless, this introduction presents the essence of a fascinating and (at the very least) plausible thesis. Darwin scholars should look forward to its presentation in full. And, even as it stands, Desmond and Moore have provided an exceptionally rich and evocative introduction to one of Darwin’s most under-read books.

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John C Burnham, *What is medical history?* Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005, pp. vii, 163, £45.00 (hardback 0-7456-3224-6), £17.99 (paperback 0-7456-3225-4).

Having pursued my medical studies via the diversion of a history of medicine degree, I am frequently asked to justify and explain my interest in the subject. I was intrigued, therefore, to discover John Burnham’s work, which details in part the author’s theories as to the importance of medical history, and provides an explanation of what it is about the subject that attracts such

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extensive scholarship. Studying medical history, according to Burnham, is useful in that it leads one to a more general inquiry into the past and the history of society, and prompts the consideration of a broader range of ideas, such as the quality of the information we examine. Moreover, it is the ubiquity of disease, its cures and its healers that ensures a receptive audience for the study of the history of health.

Burnham's work is structured around his theory that the history of medicine is analogous to five intertwining dramas, each of which is represented by a separate chapter. The first three dramas are the Hippocratic triad of doctor, patient, and disease, with the remaining two chapters of the book describing the discovery and communication of knowledge, and medicine and society. The metaphor of drama is used to explain another aspect of the appeal of medical history: "one simply gets drawn into the continuing story" (p. 80).

Burnham's other focus amounts essentially to a history of the history of medicine. In other words, this book does not detail the specific events and ideas of the past, though these are used as examples, but rather why and how the history was written. For example, the reader learns how medical history changed from being written by and for physicians to becoming the domain of social historians. The outlook and ideas of the historians, as influenced by their socio-political context, are described far more than the history itself.

This is a densely written book, covering a wide chronology and introducing an abundance of topics in a fairly slim volume. As such it can be difficult to follow in places and the style is often confusing. However, this is an enjoyable read and although the drama metaphor becomes a little overstretched by the end, it does give the work a lively and original tone.

Although the author intends his book for the history of medicine novice, I would recommend it more as a supplement to the study of the subject, rather than as an introduction. A number of important concepts are introduced, such as the idea of framing disease and the question of when discoveries become real, but these are notions perhaps best understood alongside a

study of the history itself. In other words, Burnham's work does not particularly add anything new to the historiography, but it does provide an excellent summary of information.

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Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Fr nder and Gottfried Gabriel (eds), *Historisches W rterbuch der Philosophie*, band 12: W–Z, Basel, Schwabe, 2005, pp. 1555, SFr 368.00, €257.50 (hardback 3-7965-0703-4).

After more than forty years, the *Historisches W rterbuch* reaches its end with *Zynismus*. Some might consider this appropriate, for cynics might view the whole enterprise as outdated, old-fashioned, and, in the age of the internet, irrelevant to historians and philosophers alike. They would be wrong, for this is a monument of scholarship that provides far more than a summary of past results. Not only do the authors survey the development of philosophy over the centuries, but they frequently provide starting points for further reflection about future directions of research. For those with German, there are inexhaustible riches here, and even those without German may benefit from the considerable bibliographies that accompany each article.

For the historian of medicine, this is perhaps the most valuable volume of all, for it surveys growth (*Wachstum*) and development (*Wirkungsgeschichte* and cognate words), time (*Zeit*), change (*Wechsel*) and interaction (*Wechselwirkung*), in man and woman (*Weiblich*). The world (*Welt*), from its (non-)generation to its future (*Zukunft/Weltende*), is here for the contemplation of the cosmopolite (*Weltgesellschaft*), who might be interested in the ways in which the West has defined itself and been defined. One can follow philosophers as they have attempted to define essence (*Wesen*) according to their various understandings of truth (*Wahrheit*). A desire for pleasure (*Wollust*) outstripping well-being