

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.

Margaret Pelling
Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine
University of Oxford

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