

Book Reviews

the years around 1700, while damning the persistent presence of theoretical inquiries—he calls them “philosophical meanderings” (p. 170)—concerning generation. Because early modern medical interest in monstrous births was largely motivated and structured by debates on generation, Wilson’s intolerance of, and unfamiliarity with them renders this aspect of his book at best unrevealing.

Yet he does not do much better with the early history of anatomical approaches to monstrosity, to which he claims to be more sympathetic. A number of sixteenth-century anatomists, including Berengario da Carpi, Andreas Vesalius, and Realdo Colombo, had much to say about the range of human variation based on their own dissections, yet their names do not even appear in the index. In fact, the shape and chronology of Wilson’s argument appears to be largely an artefact of his almost exclusive reliance on vernacular sources. His contention that the years around 1700 saw the emergence of a new, medical and “scientific” (i.e. anatomical) approach to monstrous births amounts for the most part only to the observation that anatomists and medical theorists were increasingly writing in the vernacular rather than in Latin.

Wilson is misleading and unreliable as a historian of medicine, and his work generally lacks an analytical edge. But his survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century vernacular and lay texts is a real contribution, and he has provided many useful references for which both cultural historians and historians of the body will be grateful.

Katharine Park, Wellesley College

BRIAN LAWN, *The rise and decline of the scholastic ‘Quaestio Disputata’: with special emphasis on its use in the teaching of medicine and science, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Leiden and New York, E. J. Brill, 1993, pp. x, 176, Gld. 90.00, \$51.50 (90–04–09740–6).

In 1963, Brian Lawn, a London physician, published *The Salernitan questions*, a fascinating study of a forgotten chapter in the history of medieval science and medicine. In it he showed how particular problems, debated in the school of Aristotle in the fourth century BC, were transmitted, in a variety of forms, to the Middle Ages, and were still being discussed in the sixteenth century. This book attempts the same for the *Quaestio disputata*, the discussion of doubtful points in medicine and science in a formal, logically structured manner within university teaching. We are led from twelfth-century Paris, via the Oxford philosophers of medieval Merton, and some of the greats of Padua and Siena, like Taddeo Alderotti, Ugo Benzi, and their Italian successors of the sixteenth century, Zimara, Vernia, and Nifo, to seventeenth-century Edinburgh and, finally, Paris.

There are many insights in both text and notes, but there are serious weaknesses overall, in part because the topic itself is never clearly defined. The *Quaestio* can be both narrow and wide, based on logical, syllogistic reasoning or designed to resolve a doubtful point, or any combination of these; it may refer to a particular educational form or to a stage in a university career. It is hard to grasp such a Protean concept, or to agree (or, equally, disagree) that it laid the foundation of the Scientific Revolution (p. 2). Its role in *physica* and medicine would have been clearer, had Dr Lawn had the opportunity to read J. J. Bylebyl’s essay on this theme in *Osiris*, 6, 1990.

Besides this problem of definition, the book suffers from a lack of perspective. If the “great days” of the *Quaestio* were over in theology by 1300, and in medicine by 1400 (p. 83), then its decline took remarkably long. The same topics continue to recur in seventeenth-century Wittenberg and in eighteenth-century France, as is shown by a mere glance at the many medical theses cited by L. W. B. Brockliss in his *French higher education* (1987), and in most of them, logic, rhetoric, and the analysis and citation of classic texts play much greater roles than any form of experimentation. The *Quaestio* turned into the thesis, but how and when, this book does not make clear. Certainly the *Quaestio* form was far from discredited, if in 1590 a German publisher thought it profitable to turn into *Problemata* sections of a large medical compilation by a long-dead Italian professor, itself the product of massive editorial reorganization (contrast p. 84, where Dr Lawn misrepresents the book).

Secondly, the fifteenth century disappears, along with most of the northern European universities. The *Quaestio* declined in popularity, we are told (p. 83), but, as Pesenti’s *Professori e promotori* (1984), shows, students and lecturers continued to ask *Quaestiones*, and they were debated at final

Book Reviews

examinations in Padua and elsewhere. The German universities followed slavishly their Italian models. Eberhard Knab, active in Heidelberg from 1451 to 1480, was not alone in leaving memorials of his teaching in the form of *Quaestiones* (see the *Verfasserlexikon*, s.n.), and the orations delivered by Melanchthon's pupils in the Wittenberg of the 1540s and 1550s, printed among his collected works, would not have been out of place two hundred years earlier in Siena. True, they cite more authorities, and use a little less scholastic logic than their medieval precursors, but they frequently debate the same questions and use the same arguments.

In short, while Dr Lawn has again drawn attention to an unfashionable area of medieval teaching, he has barely scratched the surface. He has raised interesting questions, and made some suggestive connections, but much still remains to be done before one can see exactly what role was played in the medieval and renaissance university by the *Quaestio disputata*.

Vivian Nutton, Wellcome Institute

ARTHUR STILL and IRVING VELODY (eds), *Rewriting the history of madness: studies in Foucault's Histoire de la folie*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. x, 225, £35.00 (0-415-06654-9).

This collection of papers, most of them from volume 3 of *History of the human Sciences*, is a historiographical achievement. Based on a "challenging thesis" from Colin Gordon, published in 1990 in that same journal, in which he launched a vigorous counter offensive at the critics of Michel Foucault's *Madness and civilisation* (or *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, to use the original 1961 French title), it comprises various responses to that initiating article, and a new final review by Gordon himself entitled 'Rewriting the history of misreading'. This somewhat complex background may reflect rather accurately the nature of studies in the world of Foucault, but should not be allowed to detract from the essence of the arguments enclosed.

First of all it should be noted that, given that the contributions are by individuals such as Robert Castel, Jan Goldstein, Roy Porter, Andrew Scull, and Eric Midelfort, this is no minor skirmish. The smell of cordite, as well as perhaps some more metaphorical form of nerve gas is heavy in the air. Since the essays are largely written in English, with numerous quotes from the French original, the psychological grammar of English ideas is to the fore. Arguments about the meaning of individual words, of brief phrases, and of whole sentences abound. Drifting through the narrative is the persisting image of the "Ship of Fools", in particular Foucault's alluring line "les fous alors avaient une existence facilement errante". Does this mean "the mad led an easy wandering life", or, could "the existence of the mad of that time . . . easily be a wandering one"? Although much debate concentrates on this one sentence, it has to be agreed in the end that nobody knows, least of all, unfortunately, Michel Foucault himself.

As Geoffrey Pearson, Professor of Social Work at Goldsmith's College, rather succinctly points out "something goes wrong in any translation". More forcefully the linguist and translator Anthony Pugh, in a winningly erudite piece full of tropes and catachresis, feels that the work *Histoire de la folie* makes us "aware of the madness of figures and the folly of translation". He is also brave enough to admit that reading Foucault is like "listening to a very long unfinished joke: there is not just an ever increasing time-lag between reading and comprehension, but no cathartic release at all, no revelation of meaning that might restore sense to the world of appearances and misnomers". To the historian Allan Megill the work in question derives from "a machine for the generation of ambiguity from decentred antitheses", while to Roy Porter, the doyen nowadays of broad-brained English common sense, Foucault's strength lay in his linking the history of madness to the history of reason. However, Porter does also point out quite clearly the mistakes in the Great Confinement theory in relation to the English experience at least, and the meaninglessness of certain statistics. The non-applicability of the specific French experience has also been noted with regard to other countries.

But as one reads through this multivariate collection, a number of troubling thoughts intervene. Should we, already, be treating the Foucaultian oeuvre as some kind of sacred text? To be sure, Michel Foucault woke us all up from the grey slumber of accepted history. Was that a particularly