

of original sin were numerous and contradictory. The consequence was that the list of hereditary diseases included leprosy and gout, but none of the diseases that today would be found in a similar list.

Two interesting lessons emerge from reading this book. The first is the role of interdisciplinarity considered in an extensive way. The emergence of the notion of hereditary disease in the Middle Ages required borrowing the notion of heredity from its use in law. The concept of latency, necessary to explain the transmission of hereditary diseases, has its roots in theology.

The second lesson comes from the comparison with what happened in the nineteenth century. The rise of a science of heredity was made possible by the coalescence, the conjunction of different social, scientific, and epistemic transformations. In particular, the disconnection between the characteristics of organisms, humans included, and the place in which they were living, due to the increasing circulation of plants, animals and humans, as well as the classifications of human beings following colonisation, had very important roles in the rise of a science of heredity. It explains the limits of the hereditarian vision in the Middle Ages.

All the contributions collected in this book are rich in information and offer acute critical perspectives. This book will be of interest not only to those involved in the history of medicine in the Middle Ages, but also to all historians working on the interaction between sociocultural conditions and the growth of scientific knowledge.

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Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. xiv + 326, £30.00/\$40.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-300-13911-2.

Controversy has followed Paracelsus. In his lifetime and for a century and a half afterwards his supporters and detractors were strongly opposed. There were those, however, who compromised and accepted some of Paracelsus' medical and chemical theories, or assimilated them into Galenic medicine whilst rejecting his radical social and religious views. Historians have also been divided, some tending to ignore his influence on medicine, especially as by the beginning of the eighteenth century it became less discernible. Others, German scholars above all, have seen Paracelsus as not only a seminal figure in the attack on elite university-based Galenic medicine, but also as an important player in the reform movement in sixteenth-century Germany.

Charles Webster is amongst the fervent supporters. In this important book he goes beyond Walter Pagel's path-breaking work which contextualised and explicated Paracelsus' natural philosophical, medical and chemical ideas. Published some sixty years ago, Pagel's *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* was a brilliant analytical work that took a broad approach to the history of ideas and did not limit itself to a narrow 'rationalistic' perspective.

Today, most students and many historians of medicine find its conceptual scope and deep scholarship difficult, even too difficult. Moreover, the social and many of the religious aspects and contexts to Paracelsus' work were only very lightly sketched in by Pagel. Webster, by contrast, has written a very lively, readable book which brings together the medical and the social-religious radicalism of Paracelsus and shows that it was of one piece.

Webster portrays Paracelsus, the radical, eagerly waiting for the end of time, which he believed would come in his own lifetime, when the churches would be judged and found wanting, whilst the true believers would be gathered in by God. Paracelsus' mission was to prepare society, or rather true believers, for the final days through a symbiotically unified critique of society, religion and medicine.

As Webster shows, Paracelsus went beyond the Protestant reformers, yet was prudent enough to avoid persecution and possible execution, as when he did not pursue publishing his *De Septem Punctis Idolatriae Christianae*, whose message echoed that of the peasant leaders. Nevertheless, his social critiques were withering and applied not only to the clergy but also to professions such as medicine and the law. Such critiques are especially well contextualised by Webster, who shows how they related to the maelstrom of religious, social and medical conflicts, ideas and writings of the time.

The theme running through the book is Paracelsus' rejection of new as well as old elites, whether of the confessional groups, humanists, the professions, etc. Yet a grouping of sorts was in Paracelsus' mind, the community of the believers or saints leading an ascetic life and enlightened by the light of God could be the true reforming congregation. Such believers would practise the true medicine consisting of philosophy, alchemy and astronomy based upon magic and the kabbalah. Yet this magic was not to be limited to a small elite group possessed of esoteric knowledge. Rather, as Webster points out, it was to be universal knowledge in principle open to all, just as the 'Radical Reformation' was to be open to all. The link to Neoplatonism was there but it was transmuted from being the possession of the small group of humanists and put into the service of the new world to come.

There is much to admire in this book. The violent controversies, their tangled dimensions, the world of the *Flugschriften*, are all vividly conveyed and the recent scholarship on Paracelsus is lightly, but with good effect, brought into play. Paracelsus' ideas are explained with brilliant clarity whether it is the concept of plenitude in the macrocosm and microcosm, disease as part of the contest between good and evil, the link between poisons and medicines, or Paracelsus' conception of the Light of Nature.

There are a few caveats, sometimes Webster, like Pagel, paraphrases Paracelsus in

such a way that it is unclear if we are reading Paracelsus or Webster. But that is because of the emphatic link between Webster and Paracelsus. There is no doubt that Paracelsus, the man and his politics, is a hero figure for Webster. If this book had been written by a conservative historian about a conservative hero-figure it is likely that I and many historians of medicine would have been making critical remarks about outmodish Whig history. But the brilliance, deep scholarship and clarity of this book show that it is possible to write enthusiastically and empathetically about someone and produce a major historical work. The caveat is really about the current values held in common by historians of medicine.

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Antònia Carré (ed.), *'Libro llamado el Porque' de Girolamo Manfredi: Regimen de Salud y Tratado de Fisionomía, traducción castellana de Pedro de Ribas (1567)*, Instituto Biblioteca Hispánica, Serie básica 2, (San Millán de la Cogolla: Cilengua, 2009), pp. 585, paperback, ISBN: 978-84-937654-0-8.

Girolamo Manfredi (c.1430–93), a master of medicine and astrology at the University of Bologna for some thirty years, produced, in the second half of the fifteenth century, a didactic compilation of 568 questions and answers related to two main topics: the human body and the preservation of its health, and causal explanations regarding human behaviour. This encyclopaedic *summa*, dedicated to his patron Giovanni II Bentivoglio and entitled *Liber de Homine* (also known as *Il Perché*) belongs to the genre of *Problems* literature, which has a long history that, in the mediaeval Latin West, starts with the Salernitan questions in the