

interest is his analysis of the *consultas*, or formal opinions, whose abundant circulation in manuscript or print form constituted the most important form of debate among physicians in larger cities such as Madrid or Seville.

This is a thoroughly researched and highly suggestive study of a wide range of significant issues. It deserves a wide readership.

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Christopher Booth, *John Haygarth FRS: a physician of the Enlightenment (1740–1827)*, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 254, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 2005, pp. xv, 169, illus., \$60.00 (hardback 0-87169-254-6).

Biography of the so-called “great men” of medicine has frequently been disparaged by academic historians—especially when the author is a retired clinician. This has often been justified, as some of the works are mere collections of readily available facts with no synthesis and little understanding. Whiggish hagiography is easy to write. But good biography is important. Those who would try to understand the fundamental trends of the past and interpret them for today must know about the protagonists and be able to rely on accurate scholarship about them. The skills that the experienced clinician biographer brings to the work are very similar to those he used with his patients. The collection of primary source material (clinical examination, x-rays and pathology results), formulating the hypothesis (diagnosis) and then testing it (the treatment and follow up) is little different to the technique of a trained historian.

Haygarth was a “great man”. A true child of the Enlightenment, he had a wide circle of correspondents and friends including William Cullen, John Fothergill, Sir Joseph Banks, William Heberden and, across the Atlantic, Benjamin Waterhouse. He became an extremely busy physician in Chester, where he demonstrated that it was easier to put ideas into practice than in London. Thus he formulated a

plan, which was in a great measure successful, to eradicate smallpox in the town by inoculation. Later, he wanted to extend the plan nationwide, but nothing came of it, and shortly afterwards vaccination was promoted. On the basis of his own experiments, he believed that fever was contagious. He set up fever wards for the poor in the local infirmary, and this work laid the conceptual foundations for isolation hospitals.

At the age of fifty-eight he retired from clinical practice and went to Bath, the city of Jane Austen, Edward Jenner and Caleb Hiller Parry. For some years the Bath Philosophical Society met in his house. He turned his attention to literary work based on the mass of clinical notes he had made. This led to further publications on fever, rheumatism, and, possibly unwisely, he entered into the virulent controversy in Philadelphia as to whether what we now call yellow fever was endemic or imported from the Caribbean.

Perkins’ Tractors had become the fashionable cure-all among the valetudinarians in the town, and Haygarth exposed Perkins as a fraud and made sure that the deception was widely exposed.

True to the spirit of the age, he engaged in philanthropy. A devout Anglican, he was always interested in education for the poor and, having been a governor of the Blue Coat School in Chester, he proposed that a similar scheme could be introduced in every parish in England at very little cost. In his later years his other great interest was in devising and setting up the Bath Provident Institution as a savings bank for the benefit of the thrifty and industrious.

This study is not only a delight to read, but it will be of great value to many researchers. Anybody looking at the genesis of the understanding of fever, medicine in small town Georgian England, the history of smallpox, the transatlantic passage of medical knowledge, education for the poor and the start of the Friendly Society Movement will find something of value. Those interested in Booth’s previous work on the medical connections of the Yorkshire Dales will not be disappointed.

The book is well produced and impeccably referenced. Booth, a true clinical historian, has made his case that Haygarth’s name should be

placed “alongside the great pioneering philanthropists of the age”.

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Charles Darwin, *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*, edited and with an introduction by James Moore and Adrian Desmond, London, Penguin Books, 2004, pp. lxvi, 791, illus. £9.99 (paperback 0-140-43631-6).

Adrian Desmond and James Moore have teamed up once more to write an introduction to the Penguin edition of Charles Darwin's *The descent of man*. This is a book with a confusing history. Darwin expected it to raise a storm of clerical protest, but it elicited in the main, as Desmond and Moore put it, only “muffled growls”. It is acknowledged to be among Darwin's most important works, not least because it saw him come clean on human evolution, yet few have read it with the close attention lavished on *The origin of species*. And even many of those who have read *The descent* have done so in an egregiously selective fashion, discovering in it justifications for everything from brutal imperialism, unrestrained capitalism and state-mandated eugenics, to socialism, birth control and the enlightened rule of a secular-scientific clerisy.

Part of the difficulty with *The descent* has been that it seems to lack the prescience and cool neutrality of *The origin of species*. It appears to be far more rooted in a particular time and place, sadly lacking in the Olympian social and political detachment of Darwin's greatest and best-read book. As readers of their splendidly atmospheric Darwin biography might expect, Desmond and Moore beg to differ. They argue that *The origin of species* is very nearly as “social” as *The descent*. Accordingly, they insist that the mechanism of natural selection was underpinned by the same Whig-Malthusianism that ushered in the calculated horrors of the post-1834 workhouses and the Victorian cult of economic individualism. Moreover, only because Darwin

self-consciously avoided the subject of humans in 1859 (aside from his famous aside) has it been possible to see it as a work of biology in becoming contrast to *The descent's* impure anthropology. Wherever one stands on this debate, few would demur from Desmond and Moore's account of how prevailing racial, sexual and social prejudices infused *The descent's* account of the evolution of civilized society and the relative roles of males and females in selecting mates. Desmond and Moore do an excellent job of contextualizing Darwin's ideas about human evolution and the role of sexual selection. With their customary élan, the authors also rightly emphasize the dangerousness of Darwin's idea in a theistic society in which science remained, in the minds of many, a mere handmaiden to revealed religion.

But Desmond and Moore go further. They assert that previous attempts to restore Darwin to his proper historical context have not gone far enough. Most scholars accept that Darwin's arguments in *The descent* inadvertently injured the advocates of welfarism and female emancipation. The prevailing social and sexual prejudices that Darwin imbibed are easy to identify since the same ideas resonate today. However, there is one aspect of Darwin's upbringing and context that has been attended to far less: the anti-slavery movement. Desmond and Moore argue that we have failed to see how profoundly Darwin's mindset was shaped by the abolitionism of his grandfathers, reinforced by his personal revulsion at the brutality he witnessed being meted out to slaves (and other subject peoples) during the *Beagle* voyage. In later life, Darwin's abolitionist views may have burned at a lower intensity, but Desmond and Moore point out that his disgust at the Confederacy during the American Civil War demonstrates that slavery remained always a live issue for Charles Darwin. Abolitionism was still a touchstone of his political beliefs. And in their introduction, Desmond and Moore seek to trace, from Darwin's letters, marginalia, jottings and *The descent* itself, evidence that this passionate distaste for slavery played a major role in his biological work.