

Book Reviews

YNEZ VIOLE O'NEILL, *Speech and speech disorders in Western thought before 1600*, Westport, Conn., and London, Greenwood Press, 1980, 8vo, pp. xiii, 246, front., £12.95.

The history of classical, medieval and renaissance linguistics is a burgeoning field, as can be seen, for example, in the pages of the journal *Historiographia Linguistica*. The present work claims to be the first attempt at a survey of the history of speech in traditional natural philosophy and medicine, though the author might have noted some earlier monographs such as those of Twistleton (1873), Holmes (1885), Panconcelli-Calzia (1942, 1943), and Semaan (1963).¹ This new book was undertaken "as a test of the hypothesis that a coherent body of thought about speech and its impairments existed during the period from classical antiquity through the sixteenth century." (p. 9). The chapters are arranged in chronological order. Concentration is more on the neurological aspects of the subject than on the so-called functional disorders such as stuttering and lisping.

Much attention is given to problems of terminology, and most of these observations are valuable (e.g. p. 23, criticizing the inconsistencies of Littré's French translation of Hippocrates). However, the conjectural derivation of Ugo Benzi's term *altecha* (p. 180) is incorrect. *Altecha* is actually a latinization of the Arabic adjective *althagh*,² introduced by Gerard of Cremona in his translation of Avicenna's *Canon*.³ It describes malarticulation, especially of r or s.

The frequent clarification of the scholarly apparatus for lay readers is commendable. Historians of medicine, even in esoteric areas, do well to remember that many potential readers are not themselves historians of medicine. The transliteration of Greek orthography, on the other hand, is rather careless, e.g. *traulos* is nearly always printed as *traylos*. (Granted upsilon alone normally becomes Roman y, as in *psyche*, nevertheless in diphthongs it is always u, as in *auto*, *euphoria*.)

Furthermore, adjectives/substantives like *anaudos*, *aphonos*, *balbus*, are habitually used in this book as though they were abstract nouns. To say that someone "suffers from *balbus*" (p. 64) is grammatically equivalent to describing a mute as suffering from *speechless*. The appropriate abstract nouns are *anaudia*, *aphonia*, *balbuties*, etc.⁴ One might forbear mentioning such details were this not the first and only available survey of the subject.

There is a strong smell of the lamp throughout parts of this book. Phrases like "Galen related in a work of dubious authenticity that . . ." (p. 61) remind one more of an Escher print or a Moebius strip than of any imaginable historical reality. More puzzling still, on p. 78 it is admitted that the lack of discussion of speech in Oribasius's medical compilation "may well have resulted from the vagaries of transmission"; yet immediately afterwards this lack is described as "a fascinating finding, and one that fits appropriately into the [history-of-ideas] sequence that we have been following." A bit too appropriately, one should think. On p. 89 this gossamer thread is stretched still further: "the theme that Oribasius had begun to sound . . . had reached a crescendo." Oribasius again receives gratuitous credit on p. 77, for it was Galen, not he, who treated the rhetor afflicted with a voice impediment. Oribasius merely excerpted the case.

The distinction between language and speech is well established (pp. 5–6), but it is hardly correct to say that this distinction was generally "confused" during the period. Rather, the traditional theories were based on the concept of *logos*, or word (in a very broad sense),

¹ E. Twistleton, *The tongue not essential to speech*, London, 1873; G. Holmes, 'History of the progress of laryngology from the earliest times to the present', *Medical Press and Circular*, July 15–Oct. 7, 1885; G. Panconcelli-Calzia, *Die Phonetik des Aristoteles*, Hamburg, 1942; *idem*, *Leonardo als Phonetiker*, Hamburg, 1943; K. Semaan, *Arabic phonetics: Ibn Sina's Risālah on the points of articulation of the speech sounds*, Lahore, 1963.

² See D. Rockey and P. Johnstone, 'Mediaeval Arabic views on speech disorders: al-Razi (c. 865–c. 925)', *J. Communication Disorders*, 1979, 12: 233.

³ Lib. III, fen xvi, tri.i, cap. 2, Venice, 1562, f. 334^vG.

⁴ See H. Arens, 'Verbum Cordis: zur Sprachphilosophie des Mittelalters', *Historiographia Linguistica*, vii(1/2), 1980, 13–27.

descending through increasingly exteriorized grades of expression. The distinction between language and speech is contained within this framework, and much more besides. The subject of *logos* was considered too philosophical to fall within the scope of the book (p. 40), but the fact that its omission led to such a misconception suggests that the scope was somewhat too narrow, since medicine and philosophy were intimately linked throughout the period, and since the author herself inevitably makes many statements of philosophical bearing. For the same reason the scant mention of St. Augustine is inadequate, given his central importance in the development of western theories of speech.

On p. 102, Critchley's failure to find "reference to speechlessness in the *Kitāb al-Hawi* or *Continens* of Rhazes" is noted, but not corrected. Rhazes does refer to speechlessness in terms of differential diagnosis, as well as to other speech impediments.⁵

On p. 163 one reads: "Unexplained and seemingly unexplored by Bernard [of Gordon] was the question why humidity was believed to occlude only the nerves of motion . . . and not the nerves of sensation . . .". But Bernard did explain this: speech (an action) is more difficult and requires more energy than taste (a sense, therefore a passion), and so is more easily disrupted.⁶

Insofar as Dr. O'Neill aims to convince us of the existence of "a coherent body of thought about speech and its impairments" prior to 1600, she has succeeded. But the actual analysis of this thought, and particularly the general characterizations of its various stages, are less successful. Evidently the narrative approach was felt to be the best means of introducing the subject in palatable form – an idea which in itself has much merit. And a strictly chronological order seems to offer the most convenient possibilities for narrative development. But under the circumstances this approach seems to have virtually forced the imposition of a historical dynamic which refuses to arise naturally out of the material and is not about to do so without a great deal of further study. It is claimed, for example, that growing conflict between theology and natural philosophy/medicine affected views on speech during this period. This raises important questions, but the attempted demonstration is naïve in the extreme, both historically and philosophically.

On the whole, chapters 8 and 9, covering the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, seem the most solid. Passages of narrative interest and valuable insight can be found throughout the book, such as the discussion of speech in Roman law (p. 83 f.), or the suggestion that the influence of the silent Cistercian orders might have fostered interest in non-verbal communication (p. 143 n. 44).

Dr. O'Neill, it must be admitted, set herself a difficult task in attempting to trace such a vast subject in such a short space and without benefit of a model. The result is a handbook of issues and sources containing a wealth of information, but less satisfactory in its general conclusions and in many points of factual detail. Despite its faults this book has a certain usefulness and obviously cannot be overlooked by anyone interested in the history of speech and its disorders. But it should be used judiciously.

⁵ Rockey and Johnstone, op. cit., note 2 above, esp. p. 234.

⁶ *Lilium Medicinae* iii. 20, Naples, 1480, f. 93^a.

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DERRICK BAXBY, *Jenner's smallpox vaccine. The riddle of vaccinia virus and its origin*. London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1981, 8vo, pp. xiv, 214, illus., £8.50.

The existing literature on Edward Jenner and on what he called the "Variolae Vaccinae" (and that very term was to contribute to his troubles) is copious but has rarely been objective. On the contrary, in most cases authors have given highly subjective, not to say violently partisan, accounts, covering the full range between the extremes of Baron's misguided adulation and Creighton's vituperative onslaught on both Jenner's character and his methods, which has recently been revived in a couple of volumes which might perhaps be described as a demographer's guide to Jenner-debunking. Now, hard on the heels of the global eradication of