

Book Reviews

RICHARD KIECKHEFER, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. x, 219, illus., £20.00/\$39.50, £6.95/\$9.95 (paperback).

Magic in the Middle Ages is meant to be a general textbook on anything covered by the term “magic”—defined in the most generous sense as a cultural form—in Europe between the years c. 500 to 1500. It succeeds admirably.

Beginning with a general discussion, the author moves from “the classical inheritance” through the popular tradition of medieval magic to the Arabic-stimulated revival of occult learning, and the witchcraft trials at the close of this period. Along the way there are valuable sidelights on the late survival of Norse and Irish paganism, magic in courtly literature, and some original work on clerical necromancy.

This material bears out the promise of Kieckhefer’s starting premises—so important in determining where one ends up, and so often skewed in such a Whiggishly-bedevelled field. He views magic as essentially a crossroads, where religious/scientific, popular/learned and fictive/experiential beliefs and practices meet. The sensitivity this approach permits is paired with pragmatism: magic is defined as either natural (a branch of medieval science) or demonic (a “perversion” of religion). The combination enables Kieckhefer to cast a wide net without losing sight of the central importance of how “magic”, as a category, is not discovered but created.

For example, he follows the crucial Christian redefinition—and thereby demonization—of pagan practices and beliefs which had hitherto possessed a deeply ambiguous character. Instances are divination, which Augustine ruled was not impossible, but indeed only possible by the assistance of demons; and the elimination of any category of morally neutral spirits. (Both moves reveal the tyrannical potential of monotheism, although he tactfully refrains from pointing this out). From the fourth through the twelfth centuries, then, an essentially demonic view of magic obtained among both those who deplored it and those who took to it.

From the early thirteenth century, however, the steadily increasing flood of Arabic learning, especially translations of Greek texts, initiated something of a revolution. The idea of natural magic—that is, the non-demonic manipulation of occult forces in nature—began to hold increasing sway in both learned and popular variants. In particular, the stimulus to astrology and astral magic, always equally ambiguous in relation to the categories of science and art or craft, was tremendous. These subjects now exercised some of the finest minds in Europe (e.g., Pico and Ficino).

The later Middle Ages saw more changes, as necromancy (ecclesiastical as well as popular) renewed widespread fears about the diabolical potential, if not nature, of magic. Advocates of natural magic were thus obliged to exercise supreme circumspection and discrimination if they were to avoid becoming tainted. Of course, such discussion as this, which an introductory textbook entails (let alone a brief review), must necessarily involve generalizing. But Kieckhefer deftly avoids doing so sweepingly or crudely.

Personally, I would have liked to see more attention given to the dynamics of social classes in the historical definition and redefinition of magic. “Superstition” offers a superlative opportunity for following this process, and Roger Chartier has now given us a methodology that avoids the over-polarized and reified categories of “élite” and “popular”. I would also caution the author, in his discussion of astrology, not to conflate zodiacal signs with constellations; although sharing the same names, they are quite different entities, and considerable unnecessary confusion can result. And doubtless refinements from recent research would be possible. (It is a pity that Stuart Clark’s on demonology is not included). But these are quibbles. This book can be highly recommended.

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JOHN HENRY and SARAH HUTTON (eds), *New perspectives on Renaissance thought: essays in the history of science, education and philosophy in memory of Charles B. Schmitt*, London, Duckworth and Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, 1990, 8vo, pp. xi, 324, illus., £42.00.

Charles Schmitt was a pioneer in various fields of Renaissance intellectual history through extensive bibliographical work and solid historical scholarship. The very existence of Renaissance Aristotelianism, universities, arts, philosophies, and sciences as legitimate areas of

Book Reviews

current study owes much to Schmitt's scholarship. He died in April 1986. This volume collects essays by scholars of diverse backgrounds as a tribute to Schmitt's achievements.

Several essays extend and develop work begun by Schmitt: Eckhard Kessler provides a useful review of how Renaissance Aristotelianism is interrelated to Renaissance humanism and Platonism; through an examination of the treatments of infinite divisibility and of the nature of motion, John Murdoch identifies the core of Renaissance (Jesuit) Aristotelianism with the (Thomist) natural philosophy of the thirteenth century; Stephen Pumfrey illustrates Schmitt's long-standing conviction of the vitality of Renaissance Aristotelians through two (Jesuit) responses to Gilbert's magnetic philosophy; in a study of the printers of Ramist philosophy textbooks, Ian Maclean draws attention to the necessity, when dealing with bibliographies of Renaissance publications, of bearing in mind the far from "neutral" motives of publishers.

Others have applied what the editors have called Schmitt's "unificationist" view of Renaissance intellectual history (pp. vii f.) with interesting results: Lisa Jardine demonstrates that even from such tangential primary sources as Gabriel Harvey's marginalia we may learn how the English understood their "civilisedness" by identifying themselves with Rome and the classical culture; Vivian Nutton shows how much information there is to be extracted from two unusual prefaces by an understudied Italian medic; Nancy Siraisi disentangles various trends of Renaissance thought in the humanist critiques of medicine.

Most notable is perhaps the potential of scholarship carried on into fields even beyond Schmitt's interests, in particular the theological and religious context, which, according to Luce Giard, Schmitt himself "curiously" never addressed directly (p. 268). Here Richard Popkin calls for further research into the serious religious and ideological context in which the relationship of scepticism to religion changed drastically between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment; by looking into the theological implications of Paracelsus' philosophy, Charles Webster demonstrates why Conrad Gessner was dismissive of it but at the same time could pursue Paracelsian iatrochemistry; Laurence Brockliss explains the "sluggish" reception of Copernican cosmology in Catholic France through the problems posed by Jansenism; while Richard Sorabji explains the various Arabic readings of Aristotle's God and their influences.

At the end of the volume there is an intellectual biography of Schmitt by Luce Giard and a useful bibliography of Schmitt's works, by which we are reminded of his extraordinary breadth and depth of scholarship.

As many of the essays have done in this volume, to pursue and continue scholarship in the spirit of Schmitt, and reap new and fruitful results is a tribute worthy of his achievements. Even to a student of Renaissance philosophy who never had the privilege to meet Charles Schmitt, this collection of essays amply demonstrates the impressive breadth of his influence and his exceptional ability to bring together scholars from different fields, even after his death.

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JACQUES FERRAND, *A treatise on lovesickness*, transl. and ed. Donald A. Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, Syracuse University Press, 1990, 8vo, pp. xvi, 709, \$49.95.

Almost precisely contemporary with Burton's *Anatomy of melancholy*, Jacques Ferrand's *Traité de l'essence et guérison de l'amour* (1623) bears numerous close resemblances to that work, by which it has always been eclipsed. Its scholarly style, for one thing, is of a piece with Burton's humanistic encyclopaedism, stuffed with classical, Arab, medieval and Renaissance learning, and interwoven with a rich texture of quotation (a habit mirrored almost to the point of self-parody by the enthusiastic editors of this erudite edition, who have assembled an apparatus of introductory contextualization and learned notes at least double the length of Ferrand's text).

For another, Ferrand, like Burton, sees love melancholy as of a piece with the deeper madness and sadness of the human condition, although it is noteworthy that, unlike Democritus Junior, he confines himself essentially to the miserable excesses of profane love, omitting the divine. And, just like his English counterpart, the French physician, who practised near Toulouse, though where he trained remains unclear, treats melancholy as a disorder seated simultaneously