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method of explanation and the nature of scientific laws in the human sciences in no way differ from those in the natural sciences. Scientific laws in the human sciences describe generative mechanisms that underlie events. For example, the Freudian Unconscious is a description of a number of generative mechanisms that underlie psychological events. The human sciences differ from the natural sciences only in the means by which hypotheses are tested. The human sciences are denied decisive experimental test situations, but instead test hypotheses *empirically* by means of their explanatory power.

Building on his arguments about the stratified nature of reality and science, Bhaskar then develops a persuasive anti-reductionist argument, which effectively demolishes the claims made by Weber and Popper, amongst others, that social explanations are ultimately reducible to explanations about individuals. He lucidly demonstrates that social phenomena must possess real causal effectivity.

Perhaps the most exciting section in *The possibility of naturalism* is the chapter on 'Agents' in which Bhaskar demonstrates with great clarity and vigour that reasons *are* causes, thereby challenging a shibboleth that has bedevilled so much research in psychology and psychiatry. In demonstrating that reasons are causes Bhaskar creates a space for a true psychology, a space that has all too often been occupied in the past by behaviourism or a specious biologism.

Disavowing positivism, Bhaskar demonstrates that the only adequate means of testing a theory in the human sciences is by reference to its explanatory power. Disavowing the hermeneutic tradition, he argues that theories must have an empirical basis in reality and be testable, rather than be judged by special criteria founded on an epistemology of meaning. In sailing such an elegant course between the distractions of positivism and hermeneutics, Bhaskar charts out an exciting future for the human sciences.

One major implication of his argument is that it should now be possible to develop an adequate *typology* of the social and psychological sciences. This field has, up till recently, been so dominated by sectarianism, reductionism, and polemic that the central question of the pertinence and explanatory power of different theories has not been adequately addressed. Bhaskar's work implies that the theories of behaviourism, psychoanalysis, or cognitive psychology, for example, each describe, more or less adequately, a certain stratum of generative mechanisms that underlie human behaviour and experience. What is urgently required is the construction of an adequate typology by means of which these areas of explanatory efficacy can be described and articulated.

Anyone with an interest in the history and future of the human sciences should read these crucial books.

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M. A. SCREECH, *Rabelais*, London, Duckworth, 1979, 8vo, pp. xviii, 494, £35.00

Law-student, ex-monk, genial friar, scholar, doctor, diplomat, family man, and best-selling author, Rabelais strikes us today as perhaps the most approachable of the

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forbidding Renaissance polymaths, but his apparently “popular” works are far from being correspondingly accessible. Professor Screech’s book, which rivals its subject in scale, scope, and the intricacy of its erudite ramifications, sets out to make Rabelais’ comic works more comprehensible and hence more enjoyable for a wider public. It is not a book to read from cover to cover, nor an elementary introduction, but for those already acquainted with Gargantua, Pantagruel, and their background of intellectual humanism and evangelical catholicism it is a first-class companion or commentary such as Rabelais himself might have used with his classical texts.

Professor Screech finally disposes of the nineteenth-century myths of Rabelais the atheist, or the populist, literary or political, and then triumphantly re-establishes his claim to our attention as a writer and thinker by a masterly elucidation of the complex inner and outer worlds which he inhabited. His Rabelais emerges as a serious theologian, a demanding moralist, a progressive jurist, and, most fascinating of all, an intelligent, thinking Christian during the years of theological flux which separated Luther’s Theses from the Council of Trent. He had turned from a monastic to a medical vocation in middle life, not out of lost faith, but out of Christian conviction, and saw his spare-time writing as a continuation of his therapeutic work – laughter is the best medicine. Both his cruelty and his crudity can be seen to have medical roots which make them more profoundly comic and less offensive: the black comedy extracted from the technically precise descriptions of injuries may indicate doctors’ reliance on laughter as a psychological support in the face of clinical impotence. Crude terminology was a feature of contemporary textbooks, and Rabelais regards human excretions with the seriousness appropriate to a doctor’s main diagnostic and therapeutic aids; thus catarrh achieves apotheosis as a sustained metaphor for truth in an exploration of epistemology and linguistic philosophy. The ignorant doctor, clutching his emblematic enema, (a familiar figure of fun from the farces such as Rabelais had acted in as a very mature medical student), is invoked to discredit obscurantism and propagate his own brand of progressive medicine, with its frequent dissections and enthusiasm for Jewish and Arabic as well as Greek learning. Panurge’s encomium of his codpiece is even funnier when seen as an erudite attack on Galenism, using arguments drawn from Plato and Hippocrates and revealing Rabelais’ characteristically moral approach to the superficially medical problem of the generation of semen. Similarly he sought dignified and humane palliatives for what he regarded as the medical fact of “hysterically” induced moral frailty in women, while exploiting the comic potential of this tragic aspect of the human condition both in Panurge’s perplexity over marriage and in the earlier allusions to the medico-legal controversy over the maximum duration of pregnancy. The main theme of the *Tiers Livre* is the difference between pathological derangement and noble Christian folly, a distinction recognized even in law. Finally we learn that Rabelais, taking advantage of the monopoly on the authorship of almanacs which French law conferred on doctors, composed several, both scientific and satirical, with the double aim of establishing astronomy as a respectable science and liberating the credulous public from superstitious fear.

This was typical of a man who, for all his heroic work among the plague victims of Lyons, took a humanist rather than humanitarian view of the function of medicine in

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producing “whole” men, and always remained true in spirit to his original Franciscan vocation to communicate truth in a joyous and jocular style.

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ENID RHODES PESCHEL (editor), *Medicine and literature*, New York, Neale Watson Academic Publications, 1980, 8vo, pp. xix, 204, \$15.00.

This collection of essays by American academics ranges widely over European and American literature of the first and second ranks from the Renaissance to the present day, touching on most conceivable connexions between medicine and literature; the doctor as author and as character; medicine as a tool of the biographer and the literary critic; the use of medical metaphors and symbols to convey sociological, psychological, and metaphysical insights or messages; even the role of literature in medical education. There are probably few totally original contributions to literary criticism, and one or two essays may appear naïve or pretentiously abstract, but they have the merit of being comprehensible without first-hand knowledge of the authors discussed, and together they form a stimulating exercise in thematic comparative literature. The only medico-literary phenomena left largely untreated are the doctor as a figure of fun or sensational horror: the examples chosen invariably show him in a pathetic, tragic, or heroic light, and the emphasis on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reinforces the tendency for doctors to appear in a quasi-sacerdotal role in relation to the new creed of social humanism, with harsh judgement passed on the inadequate or renegade. The same pervasive earnestness is evident in the collection's propagandist undertone, its call for literary studies to humanize clinical practice, and for medical men to turn to creative writing not only to establish human contact between their profession and the laity but also to rescue literature from incipient verbal nihilism with a dose of reality. This vision of literature as an extension of or substitute for medical practice has a distinguished sponsor as far back as Rabelais, but like the non-evaluative approach of most essays, it raises, without answering them, questions about the interrelationships of creativity and experience, of artistic and scientific truth, of conviction and communication.

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LUTZ RICHTER-BERNBURG, *Persian medical manuscripts at the University of California, Los Angeles. A descriptive catalogue*, Malibu, Calif., 1978, 4to, pp. xxii, 297, [no price stated].

The medical manuscript collection of University of California, Los Angeles, consisting of 132 Persian and two Arabic titles, although rather small, is of a remarkable quality which should appeal to anyone interested in the history of Persian medicine. Its historical value is due to the fact that the collection covers almost all the classical period during which the Persian language was used to write on medical subjects (beginning of the fifth to the end of the thirteenth century A.H.), and includes the