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Irina Metzler. *Fools and Idiots?: Intellectual Disability in the Middle Ages.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. 256 pp. $105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7190-9636-5.

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Were people with intellectual disabilities recognized as such in the Middle Ages? Were they distinguished and treated differently from the insane and those with other disabilities? Irina Metzler answers "yes" to these questions in her provocative third book on the subject of disability in the Middle Ages. Metzler's first two books treated physical disability or impairment; in this volume she approaches the even more fraught subject of medieval people with intellectual disability (hereafter, ID), who were known as "fools" in English contexts and "idiots" in many European languages. Lest anyone object to her use of these now offensive terms, Metzler is hyperaware of the dangers and power of the words used in many cultures to separate, define, and discriminate against people with disabilities. She is therefore careful to dedicate two entire chapters to the historiography and terminology of ID in the past (primarily, but not exclusively, in Western cultures), as a prelude to her study of ID in the Middle Ages. The all-important question mark in the book's title serves as an indicator that we should question the use of terms like "fools and idiots" now and in the past. We must use words like "fool and idiot" when they appear in the historical documents for, as she persuasively argues in her first and last chapters, "trying to be politically correct [and not using such words or even avoiding the topic in historical inquiry] would be counter-productive, since one would have to brush these historical facts under the carpet and pretend there were no 'idiots' in pre-modern societies" (p. 231).

This book is most like her first, ***Disability in Medieval Europe*** (2006), in that both can serve as toolkits—packed with terminology, historiography, catalogues of primary sources, and proposed theoretical frameworks—to aid those who wish to explore the subject of medieval disability. In constructing this toolkit for the analysis of historical "idiocy," Metzler claims "to be truly interdisciplinary" by looking "at the cultural, scientific (natural-philosophic), theological, philosophical, medical, legal and sociological aspects" of her topic (p. 21). To achieve that level of interdisciplinarity, Metzler has written a work more of synthetic historiography than of original analysis, building and commenting on historians and anthropologists who have examined the history of ID and mental afflictions in various cultures (including especially, but not limited to, C. F. Goodey, Basil Clarke, and Judith Neaman).

Metzler offers no single argument in the book, but each chapter returns to the question of what defined "natural fools" in the Middle Ages, and how they were treated in different times and places in medieval Europe. These "natural fools"

are those people recognized as born and living their entire lives with significant intellectual disabilities, whom historians must distinguish both from the insane and from those who acquired mental disabilities through injury or aging. "Natural fools" must also be distinguished from the better-known courtly fools of the later Middle Ages, or "artificial fools," in that they were merely acting as fools, even if they had a physical debility or difference such as dwarfism. (This is a subject Metzler had already approached briefly in her second monograph, ***A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages***, in 2013.) In modern terms, the "folly" or "idiocy" of most of these natural fools can be identified with one of two congenital neurodevelopmental disorders: autism spectrum disorder or Down syndrome. Some medieval people with ID may have had conditions more readily recognized and treated today, and not considered as IDs, including poor hearing and poor eyesight.

But if congenital ID was recognized in the Middle Ages as a condition distinct from other disabilities and madness, Metzler asks at several points, why do we not find any medical or miraculous cures for "fools and idiots" in the Middle Ages as we do for every other sort of physical and mental ailment or disability? The answer for this striking absence in the sources lies, Metzler argues, in that medieval physicians, philosophers, theologians, and lawyers all (in their respective ways) treated such fools as innocents and children, who were not capable of taking care of themselves but neither were they responsible for their actions or sins, which apparently justified their failure to perceive ID as a condition in need of a cure. Metzler does recognize, as she did in her previous two books, that most of these sorts of arguments about disability in the Middle Ages are found only in sources from after the twelfth century, and might not necessarily have applied in earlier periods for which sources are much rarer.

The book is organized into seven chapters: an introduction of two chapters, four thematic chapters on medieval ID, and a concluding, shorter seventh chapter with some broad discussion of the significance of ID to the history of rationality. As noted above, Metzler uses the first two chapters as a defense of the study of ID in the Middle Ages and of her use of terms like fool and idiot to describe those with ID. Chapter 1, "Pre-/Conceptions: Problems of Definition and Historiography," is the most difficult in the book, at least for a historian: here she guides the reader through the progressive definition and redefinition of ID over the last century by modern psychologists, anthropologists, and physicians. To aid this discussion, she makes frequent recourse to the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's ***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*** (2013). In order to identify and study medieval ID, she argues, we need to separate the clinical realities of certain IDs (seen most obviously and painfully with the microcephaly associated with Down syndrome) from the social construction of disturbances in mental functioning: "different cultures at different time and place [***sic***] had differing concepts of mental functionality" (p. 11). Such provisos are necessary since, as Metzler reminds us, almost every study of ancient or medieval "fools" thus far has made facile and unsupported generalizations about those with ID in the past, such as assuming that "primitive" peoples did not recognize ID, or that premodern people often killed children with ID, or that those with ID often became court fools, and so on.

Metzler's second chapter, "From ***Morio*** to Fool: Semantics of Intellectual Disability," provides a case study for her argument in the first chapter that some aspects of ID are socially (and linguistically) constructed. Here she briefly and clearly summarizes the research of numerous other linguistic, biblical, and literary scholars concerning the words used in major Western languages for fools and idiots. These languages include biblical Hebrew, Arabic, other Indo-European roots, ancient dialects of Greek from Homer-

ic to ***koine*** to Byzantine, ancient and medieval Latin, Old and Middle English, and medieval French and German. She convincingly demonstrates that the ways in which we now describe ID in modern English, French, and German (at least) are products only of later medieval shifts in meaning, and thus we must be wary of "false friends": the medieval Latin ***idiota***, for example, is not the same as the "idiot" of 1900 or of 2000.

Metzler dedicates each of chapters 3-6 to an exploration of ID in the Middle Ages according to a single theme, respectively medical (or natural-philosophical), psychological, legal, and cultural. Chapter 3, "Cold Complexions and Moist Humors: Natural Science and Intellectual Disability," covers well-trodden ground by reviewing ancient and medieval understandings of the anatomy and function of the human brain, in particular concerning the common belief in the three "cells" of the brain. She provides more focused discussions on the physiological theories of Costa Ben Luca, William of Conches, Albertus Magnus, Robert Kilwardby, and Konrad von Megenberg. All of these medieval authors agreed, with only slight variations in interpretation, that a permanent or congenital loss of reason (ID) has physical causes, usually an overabundance of cold and moist humors. Claudius Galen, as in most areas of medieval medicine, provided the language and patterns of understanding for ID and its potential aetiologies; he understood idiocy as a diminution of mental capacity, rather than a disease, which lends further support to Metzler's argument that medieval people did not treat idiocy as a condition to be cured by medical or miraculous means. Chapter 4, "The Infantile and the Irrational: Mind, Soul and Intellectual Disability," forms a pair with its predecessor: where chapter 3 examines the physicality of medieval ID, in chapter 4 Metzler looks at the immaterial aspects of the medieval mind. These include the soul, mind, and intellect, which means that much of this chapters is a review of the many ancient and medieval treatises "De anima" (On the soul), which most closely approximate what we now call psychology. She necessarily reviews the ideas of Aristotle and Augustine, the two pillars of medieval thought, on the subject of the damaged intellect, but most of the chapter (like its predecessor) is dedicated to thirteenth-century scholastic theologians and philosophers: Giles of Rome, John Blund, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas.

Chapters 5 and 6 also form a pair in that each takes ID out of the realm of scholasticism and universities and into daily life. In chapter 5, "Non-consenting Adults: Laws and Intellectual Disability," Metzler examines the definition of ID in medieval legal codes and courts of law. As in previous chapters, Metzler sets out to demonstrate that medieval people could distinguish ID from madness and other forms of mental disability, a distinction that she claims modern historians have routinely failed to recognize. Nonetheless, her evidence also shows that numerous religious and secular legal traditions grouped together those with ID, the insane, children, and those with severely impaired hearing and vision. Apart from some brief overviews of Judaic, Roman, and Islamic sources on the legal status of "idiots," almost all the sources in this chapter are insular in origin: a significant section on Irish laws, followed by analyses of "natural fools" in the English ***Prerogativa Regis***, Bracton's ***De legibus***, ***Fleta***, ***Mirror of Justices***, ***Britton***, and patent rolls of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. For these sections, Metzler makes extensive use of the works of scholars like Basil Clarke, Wendy Turner, and Nigel Walker on law and mental afflictions in premodern England. I wanted to see more from this chapter on ID in medieval Roman (civil) law. If nothing else, Metzler should have given far more space than a single paragraph to all of Roman law, when she dedicates a full five pages to the far less influential Old Irish law texts.

In chapter 6, "Fools, Pets and Entertainers: Socio-Cultural Considerations of Intellectual Disabil-

ity," Metzler returns to a topic she already examined in her second book, that of the identity and function of courtly fools. She relies especially on the valuable documentary evidence from later medieval noble and royal households, where so-called fools were kept. She also fruitfully applies the "dominance and affection" theories of Yi-Fu Tuan, in his sociological studies of pets, to her study of court fools. It is difficult, she admits, to separate the "natural fools" from the far more common "artificial fools," but she argues that the former were kept essentially as "pets" in a growing number of wealthy households in the later Middle Ages. While many of the known "fools" in the eleventh and twelfth centuries probably did not have ID, since they also served as messengers, woodsmen, and in other posts of responsibility, it appears that by the end of the Middle Ages more fools were "natural," since they had no responsibilities, and had keepers to watch over them (according to Metzler's interpretation of the records).

In the end, this volume is the most challenging of Metzler's three books on disability, with the most tenuous of arguments. Whereas her first two books shared the problem (if it could be called such) of an overabundance of evidence for medieval physical disability and attitudes toward it, ***Fools and idiots?*** is built on significantly shallower foundations, and I am left in doubt whether medieval people actually recognized intellectual disability as a medical or philosophical category distinct from other forms of mental illness or deficiency. Much of chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated to the implied question of how might we, as modern historians, understand ID in medieval descriptions of the mind, rather than to studies directly of any definite medieval discussions of idiocy as distinct from other forms of mental defect. Konrad of Megenberg's fascinating discussion of the "physiognomy of stupidity" (p. 73) in his ***Buch der Natur*** is a rare exception that proves the rule, and Metzler rightly returns to this work at many points in the book. By comparison, chapter 5 stands out positively as the only one that clearly demonstrates medieval people thinking deeply about congenital idiocy and its differences from other kinds of mental incompetence. This is not surprising, since so much of medieval law concerned questions of whether a person was fit to inherit or testify in court.

The book is often repetitive, as Metzler returns to the same modern studies and primary sources in each chapter, modeling different approaches to the study of medieval ID; this would not be a problem if not for her bold claims of interdisciplinarity, which really apply only to her first chapter. Compounding this problem is the lack of consistency or care in her treatment of the rare primary sources on medieval ID. To note just a few examples, there are two problems in her Latin translations just on page 70 (namely, confused renderings of the phrases ***quamdiu propter fluxum cerebri*** from Albertus Magnus and ***facie pulcherrima*** from Matthew Paris), and she has a troubling tendency to quote Middle English translations of older Latin texts, as if they represented the Latin original and its context, such as the later English translations of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's encyclopedia or of the foundation book of St. Bartholomew's, London. In these cases she wholly ignores the context of the primary sources, which she herself argues repeatedly is vital for understanding the history of disability.

Despite these concerns, I still consider this volume to be a "must-have" for any scholar working on people with mental deficiencies of any sort in the Middle Ages. Metzler provides in one convenient volume a review of much of the primary and secondary literature that could reasonably be applied to the study of ID not only in the Middle Ages but even in Greco-Roman and late antiquity. While Metzler leaves little doubt that forms of ID existed as a clinical and psychological reality in the Middle Ages, she and others have more work to do to prove convincingly that medieval people actually recognized ID as a distinct condition, and

it is on this point that I think Metzler's latest volume will see the most challenges from experts on medieval medicine, psychology, and social theory.

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