Humane Professions

In this compelling history of the co-ordinated, transnational defence of medical experimentation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Rob Boddice explores the experience of vivisection as humanitarian practice. He captures the rise of the professional and specialist medical scientist, whose métier was animal experimentation and whose guiding principle was ‘humanity’ or the reduction of the aggregate of suffering in the world. He also highlights the rhetorical rehearsal of scientific practices as humane and humanitarian and connects these often defensive professions to meaningful changes in the experience of doing science. *Humane Professions* examines the strategies employed by the medical establishment to try to cement an idea in the public consciousness: that the blood spilt in medical laboratories served a far-reaching human good.

Humane Professions

The Defence of Experimental Medicine,
1876–1914

Rob Boddice

Tampere University
For Wolfgang Behringer
Contents

List of Illustrations page viii
Acknowledgements ix

Introduction: Experior 1
1 Darwin’s Compromise 20
2 Medical Monsters? 50
3 Of Laboratories and Legislatures 80
4 Paget’s Public 103
5 Cannon Fire 138
Epilogue: Humanity and Human Experimentation 175

Select Bibliography 186
Index 200
Illustrations

0.1 ‘Vivisectional Research’  
1.1 Members of the International Medical Congress, 1881  
2.1 ‘Der Vivisector’  
2.2 ‘Die Vivisektion des Menschen’  
2.3 Carl F. Ludwig  
3.1 ‘The Great Educator’  
3.2 Max Broedel, ‘Some Welch Rabbits’, 1910  
4.1 Stephen Paget, founder of the Research Defence Society  
4.2 Research Defence Society Shop, Piccadilly  
5.1 ‘Vivisection’  
5.2 ‘Thumbs Down’  
5.3 ‘The Greatest Thing in America’
Acknowledgements

This book has been more than ten years in the making. It began with a year’s postdoctoral fellowship at the Department of the History of Science at Harvard in 2009–10. The research I did that year at the Countway Library of Medicine in Boston was foundational for what became a much broader and international archival search.

For feedback on work in progress, thanks to the history department at the University of Saskatchewan, and Rob Englebert in particular; the attendees of the European Social Science History Conference at Belfast in 2018, on a panel organized by Pilar León Sanz; the participants of the Society for the Social History of Medicine conference in Liverpool, 2018, and especially my co-presenters, Leticia Fernández-Fontecha Rumeu, Dolorès Martin Moruno and Gian Marco Vidor; Will Abberley and the participants of the Emotional Knowledge workshop at the University of Sussex, 2018; the research seminar of the Department of Social Studies of Medicine at McGill, and David Wright, Margaret Lock, Thomas Schlich and George Weisz, in particular, for their insightful questions (George Weisz and Thomas Schlich are owed extra gratitude for their material help in getting this project off the ground in the first place); the Explorations in the Medical Humanities workshop at Columbia University, 2019, particularly the organizers Arden Hegele and Rishi Goyal, and also Thomas Dodman, who provided commentary; the participants of the Canadian Society for the History of Medicine congress in Vancouver, 2019, and my co-presenter on that occasion, Cynthia Tang; and the participants of the Northeast Conference on British Studies in Montreal, 2019.

Invaluable institutional and administrative support has come from Thomas Weitner and Andrea Ladányi in Berlin, who have relieved me of enormous headaches in the process of repeatedly working across international borders. The book would have been impossible without the trust given and freedom afforded by Martin Lücke in Berlin. I reserve special mention for the long-term help and support of Christina Becher, sadly lost to us.
Acknowledgements

Rine Veith provided an essential piece of the research puzzle from the National Archives in London, as did Mike Esbester from the Bodleian Library in Oxford. To them and to Tom Rosenbaum, Lee Hiltzik (Rockefeller Archive Center) and Stephen Novak (Columbia), many thanks. Mary Y earl and Bozena Latincic at the Osler Library in Montreal greatly facilitated the core contextual work, as part of the curation of the exhibition ‘Experiment, Experience, Expertise’, which was first blighted by a fire at the Osler Library and was latterly blighted by COVID-19. With any luck, the exhibition will actually take place in 2021. Jan Casper helped enormously to sort and make sense of German primary materials. Elsbeth Heaman wondered aloud what I would make of the MRC, thus alerting me to the fact that I should indeed make something of the MRC. Greg Fisher and Paola Russo provided warmth, sympathy and nourishment, both culinary and human. Inge Rumler Olsen and Gerald W. Olsen provided essential support, making both living and working possible when it otherwise would not be.

The project was funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 742470 and was completed at the Department of Social Studies of Medicine, McGill University; the Department of History and Cultural Studies, Freie Universität Berlin; and the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences, Tampere University.


The book is dedicated to Wolfgang Behringer, who set me on a path between 2001 and 2003 that was defined by his intellectual curiosity, constant writing and the assumption that great things would happen. Such profound positivity is rare in academia, and I feel blessed to have been touched by his inspiration.

The work stands indebted to Tony Morris for getting the book over the start line at Cambridge University Press; to Lucy Rhymer for believing in the book’s promise; to Liz Friend-Smith for reaching out to me in Belfast and for putting the proposal in Lucy’s hands; and to Stephanie Olsen for sharing every minute of the writing process, as she has with every other book. And finally, a big thank-you to Sébastien, for endless cheer between winter lands, whether in lockdown or at 35,000 feet.