

Consilium 22

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To the Same D. Peter Castell

Argument

The wife of the goldsmith of Messina, one year gave birth to a monster having the form of an ass, [and] the next year bore another with the appearance of a dog. There was doubt concerning scandalous intercourse with beasts of this sort, and the woman, on account of this, was accused of forbidden unchastity, although many doctors from the defense believed, rather, that a monstrous offspring of this sort comes from the strength of the imagination, or from an illness of the uterus, or rather, from the disposition of the [parental] seeds. Peter Castell sent me this story, with a drawn image of the latest foetus, and with the following letter, in which one finds a fuller narration of the event. So that I might respond to this most serious matter in question, I shall copy down, before all else, the letters of that most illustrious man to me, and afterward, I shall say what I think concerning this doubtful matter.

Summary

1. *From human seed mixed with that of a brute no generation can follow. The contrary [is presented] in the following number.*

2. *Nothing can prevent it that, from the mixture of human seed with that of a brute, some generation should follow, whatever it may be.*
3. *When a monster is born having a mixture of human and bestial members, the evidence is against accused party.*
4. *Each and every faculty, in an animal is meant for a specific operation, and is not for another.*
5. *Since imagination is an animating faculty, it can not set about the works of the formative faculty which is a natural [faculty].*
6. *Imagination, in a pregnant woman, directs the formative power to shaping something in its manner, according to the common opinion.*
7. *Cognition is two-fold, one [kind] from the cognitive power, the other from the natural power. [But this is] false.*
8. *All things which do not have cognitive power operate from the sheer necessity of Nature.*
9. *All faculties require their own instruments.*
10. *The effects of imagination on the formation of the foetus appear to be imaginary rather than real.*
11. *The formative faculty, from which formation begins, never rests.*
12. *Nothing is formed in the beginning of conception which is not from the seed.*
13. *The woman who bore the bestial form of the foetus, does not appear free from all suspicion, rendering either in whole or in part, and therefore it is necessary to proceed further, so that the truth may be had.**

To the most distinguished and most excellent D. D. Paul Zacchia,
an illustrious man and dearest friend.

* I have inserted numbers indicating these points in Zacchia's text.

From Peter Castell Romanus, S. D.

What monsters you have revealed [*monstrasti*] to me! (Oh monstrous Zacchia, you show [*demonstras*] yourself to be a monster!)* You have revealed [*monstrasti*] the nature, differences, and causes of monsters most exactly. Truly, animals, because they may be formed contrary to nature's custom, are worthy of revealing [*monstratu*]; but together with these, you have revealed yourself to be a monstrous author of this book among illustrious men, the composers of books, and [revealed yourself] to be known and pointed to [*monstrari*] by all on account of worthy or remarkable [*monstrabilem*] excellence, just like with Pliny the Nephew [Pliny the Younger]. Moreover, I ask, who is there in all of Europe, among physicians, philosophers or those expert in laws, who does not know Zacchia and, knowing him, does not point to him [*monstret*], in as much as he has written contrary to nature, or rather above nature, by showing [*monstrando*] preternatural things, and has exalted himself with regard to this treatment of monsters? You joined law with medicine, affairs of state with philosophy, brevity with clarity, clarity with gravity, and majesty with familiarity and agreeableness, whence, my Zacchia, you rendered yourself remarkable, but to what end do you speak so much monstrosity? Listen carefully, if you love me, I want you for a few things. Your praises, the honour acquired by you on account of the abovementioned work, rendered me, as if envious of you, a lover (you yourself know best how many other [praises] I might make; for, among the rest departing from Rome towards Messina, in my place [*lous=locus?*], I was trying to substitute you, in the presence of the most eminent and revered doctor, my most clement Cardinal Bisciam, and I pursued the intent, and I was witness that no one of the authors is more apt than you) yet why does gentle desire not urge me into acting with regard to monsters; and the occasion was readily given to me, however every ability was snatched away for writing most carefully concerning this subject matter, not only from me, but from others whom you had captured beforehand. For which reason nothing remains for me, except that I might write everything for your book, which, like a conspicuous, confirming witness, treats monsters seen by you in Rome? For, we saw and considered often times together (which yoked our friendship). Lest the introduction exceed the discussion, I will [now] relate a certain story, recently observed by me, of a monster for expanding your book.

* Castell introduces his letter with a laudatory address which plays on the origins of the word "monster" from the Latin *monstrare*, meaning "to show," and its cognate *demonstrare*, meaning "to demonstrate." In classical and medieval usage of the word *monstrare*, it often meant "to show for the purpose of warning" and it was used frequently to describe prodigies and marvels.

The year past, 1635, on the feast of St. Stephen, the twenty-sixth of December, here in this noble city of Messina, the wife of the goldsmith gave birth to a monster with the appearance of a dog, and the year prior she had given birth to another having the form of an ass. Nay, more, I have heard from these inhabitants of Messina that another nobler woman three years before bore a Cyclops; By which it seems that not without reason did the ancients place the Cyclopes in Sicily. And not only these were accustomed to be born there, but also many foetuses with tails, as on the isle of Britain also, and not to mention, for my part, I also have seen that the Ligurian people are born with a tail which they cut off their infants. Nevertheless, on to our monster.

The father [of the monster of Messina] seemed to me to be around thirty years old, in body and face, of the best disposition; the mother, moreover, was of good aspect and form, but of strong and intense imagination and greatly curious. She, observing from her window an ass having intercourse in the roadway, as she tells it, and considering it intently, later gave birth to a creature in the shape of an ass [*Aselliforma*]. Recently, moreover, when she was engaged in intercourse with her husband, and a dog observed her, considering the dog as if astonished, she mentioned to her husband that she was being watched by the dog, and he responded, “What is the dog to you?” Next, carrying a foetus in her uterus for nine months, on several occasions, she heard it barking from within her, for which reason she indicated several times to her husband that she was carrying a dog in her uterus. And, at last, she gave birth to the monstrous dog, as I am describing to you, and for ten days did not expel the afterbirth, which [when it came, came] was very hard and rough, and [after that] she was well and is well. The cadaver, entrusted to me on the third day after its birth, had broken the back of its head (*occipite*). The father said that, in the exit from the uterus, the head had dragged the mother, and, thus, was broken. But, for my part, taking notice, I suspect that it was crushed because it was a monster. Its form was canine and its anus appeared very wide and flat, but it was without a tail. Its pelt, or rather, its skin was entirely without hair, was reddish, and, here, corresponded only most tenuously to human skin, and the head, moreover, if we were to consider the shape, and position of the eyes, resembled, rather, a bird than a dog, although the ears were those of a canine and the right was more oblong than the left, and was raised up. There appeared, for nostrils, a certain broad and hanging membrane, which remained very dry. It had a small and round mouth, and two teeth: lower incisors. The front feet resembled those of a dog, but without claws, and likewise, the rear feet were extraordinarily monstrous; for, they consisted of four oblong tubes, equal in length, and empty,

but bony. Some of these had received a type of round blockage on the end. The abdomen was inflated and livid; as soon as I opened it, all the insides were putrid and most fetid, so I was not able to examine it carefully. I observed only that the left kidney was very great, and I did not see the right one. Investigating by no means curiously, on account of the putridity and nausea-inducing smell, I was also unable to recognize the sex but it seemed rather to be feminine. The length of the cadaver from its clavicle to its anus was palm-width, and from its head to the bottom of its feet was one and a half times a palm's width. Thence, I carefully dried the body, which I preserve whole and as an exhibit in my museum. No one has ever doubted that this is a monster, altogether contrary to nature, for in no manner does it imitate human form, born from the seed of a human father and mother. But the woman affirms constantly that it the strong imagination of the mother preceded [the conception]. Jacob's experiment with the colour of sheep teaches, not insufficiently, that imagination leads to the generation of monsters. I wish to philosophize with you, but I fear lest the pig [presume to teach] Minerva, so I will instead be silent. I have depicted as well as I was able the monster in its size, symmetry, and shape, just as it is preserved in my museum. In anticipation, I thank you, *Vale*. [Peter Castell]

O most outstanding and beloved friend, in your letter to me, you told a story, which is not so much worthy of astonishment as it is entangled with a thousand ambiguities of doubts, among which, nevertheless, this foremost occasions the greatest concern: whether any suspicion can creep in that this woman has not mixed herself with a beast. I will not leave off discussing this because it appears to provide much of relevance to my medico-legal questions. First, however, I will give my response to the first part of your letter. Know that the praises, which so profusely from an abundant affection of the soul and from your kind inclination towards me, you ought to receive from me, certainly, I do not deny that they are most pleasing to me because they are professed by the most praiseworthy man, nevertheless, I should wish them to be more adequate and proportionate to my merits than they are, however the thing itself might be. I confess that I owe so much to you, both for this and for many other things of greater moment. I wish to pay back these debts, [if] even in a small way. But if such an occasion should ever offer itself, that I might be able to provide some confirmation of this matter either publically or privately, most

freely, indeed, I will seize it, and, meanwhile, write to me as your creditor, while I prepare myself to handle your proposed question.

[1] There is great controversy, as you know, whether any generation can follow from human seed mixed with beastly seed. Many, to be sure, or almost all, deny it especially because one will necessarily corrupt the other on account of their inconsistency, since human seed might contain divine heat, however, the seed of beasts is confessed to be far from that perfection. Add the difference of those forms, both in respect to many others, and in respect to corruptibility and incorruptibility, since human [seed] arose from outside, and is immortal and incorruptible, and beastly [seed] is brought out of the potential of matter, and is mortal and corruptible. Although there is a formative virtue in the seed of both generators, dependent on the spirit [*anima*] of both parents, one spirit is not able to unite with another, in order that they might operate harmoniously as one agent. For, the spirits and forms are said to be mixed if the virtues of the spirit are mixed together, for the virtues are virtues of a specific spirit.

[2] I leave behind those things which are deduced from these latter considerations, and which, on the face of it, seem to render impossible such an unusual generation, such considerations as the differences of gestation in the uterus, the differences of growing up periods outside of the uterus, the differences of foods, and other differences of that kind, which, nevertheless, all can be refuted by a single response, by saying that singular things produce the difficulty whenever that which is generated from parents of diverse species, retains, from necessity, the nature of both parents, and does not introduce its own [nature], but they vanish altogether when the offspring inherits, from a similar conjunction, a certain third, personal nature, appropriate to itself, requiring such a delay in the uterus as will be necessary to it, growing in the way that suits it, and, requiring those foods which are more proportionate to its nature, except that it obtained from the parents some of these from necessity, as we observe to happen in those monsters which we actually witness to be generated from parents different not only in species, but also in genus. For, whenever a generation is to follow, there is necessarily a most perfect mixture of both seeds, whence it is able to be born, [and the thing generated] derives from the seed of both parents, yet it is not the species of either of the parents, nor does it retain the nature of either one or the other, or both together, but, rather, it is a third thing which, having its own individual nature, insofar as [this nature], which pertains as much to the shape of its body and to personal constitution and

life, as to that internal shape, brought forth not more from one seed than from the other, is itself mixed from both at once.

But given the impossibility of being born from human seed and beastly seed assembling together on account of that which was said earlier about the difference of forms, certainly, this woman, about whom we write, and others, if they beget monsters of this sort, seem innocent, free from all suspicion which might have been able to creep in concerning their rumored intercourse with beasts, especially, since more generally accepted causes of this kind of generation of monsters are widely accepted, such as a defect of seed, the intemperateness [of the seed], and also a grave default, a clotting of all blood, and the strong imagination of the parent; for, there is no doubt that badly disposed seeds and unclean blood, as the nutriment feeding the seeds, are able especially to generate a monster which deviates from human form. Thus, also, the imagination by representing the image of this or of that animal, is able to be the cause, when a monster similar to the image represented is generated.

[3] I was previously of that opinion, and now, I persevere much more in the [opinion] that nothing can prevent it that from the mixture of human seed with beastly seed some generation can follow. But I judged that it should not be rashly decided whether generation of this thing, or this animal, can follow. From this [position], it is easily possible to deduce, that this woman, and whoever else has generated a similar monster, is not free from all suspicion and, therefore, is to be held a suspect of a wicked crime.

For, although, I always judge it to be altogether difficult for any generation to be able to follow from a mixture of this kind, on account of the many conditions which must coincide, as much on the part of each parent and of each seed as on the part of the carnal joining and ejaculation of seeds, nevertheless, I do not draw back on account of this difficulty from an affirmative sentence, because I consider the matter in human seed, or rather, I consider [the seed] as matter, and I consider the form as animated seed. Since the form comes from outside in such a way that the matter of the seed enters into this mixture without the form, therefore, so far as it is separated from that form, I believe altogether that [human seed] can be mixed with beastly seed, and, thereupon, there can follow some generation of animate creature, whatever it may be, an offspring of such a kind as, perhaps, was already seen by this woman.

For what is said concerning the difference of heat, and greater or lesser perfection, does not oppose this, since this does not impede that the human seed and the beastly [seed], mixed together, are able to generate some animal although they differ according to so greater and less.

However, in order to prove what we said concerning the suspicion of a carnal mixing with beasts, the exclusion of whatever other causes believed to concur in this generation will certainly be important, especially, [the exclusion] of the defect of the seeds and of the nourishing blood, and of the imagination. In our case, the defect of the seeds and blood cannot be considered since the good habits and temperaments of both parents is proven, as you reported, and they lead a healthy life, eat a laudable diet, and still enjoy a youthful age, and besides, it is impossible to believe that a defect of either parent, or of either seed, or maternal blood could generate such a monster; for, rather, it ought to be believed that no generation whatsoever follows from such a seed, and that if any should follow, it would have no defect, but would inherit a defect of the blood, so that no subsequent generation will proceed [from it]. Even if we should say that uterine moles* come about from a defect of the seed (which nevertheless, I believe are procreated from feminine seed only) yet I never admitted that tainted seed is able to generate a perfect animal (if they should degenerate from the generation of men.)

However, as far as imagination, which you yourself, in this case, and nearly all learned men, admit as the cause of similar monsters, it seems to me that it ought to be excluded altogether from this generation, both on account of the reasons that I have addressed elsewhere, and on account of the second generation of a monster by this woman. For it is unlikely that so rare and remarkable an effect, which is hardly accustomed to be seen once in a thousand years, is able to be seen in such a short space of time or in one individual, unless we assign the cause of this effect to be more apt to be brought about from her nature than [from] her imagination. But I would like, in turn, to examine briefly the reasons, or some of them, which exclude the imagination as a cause of the generation of monsters.

* The Latin *mola*, or uterine mole, is a fleshy mass which has formed in the uterus following an aborted ovum. On Galen's authority, medieval and early modern medicine held that the mole was caused by corrupted seed contained in the uterus. Zacchia here challenges Galen (*De usu partium*, xiv. 7) who stated that no conception even that of a *mola* could take place without the presence of male semen.

[4] First, therefore, each and every faculty in an animal and in man is chiefly [made] for a certain operation, and not destined for another (Fernel, *lib. 5. Physiol. Cap.3*)*, for, the concocting faculty (*Concoctrix*) is for cooking down, not for expelling or assimilating or nourishing; the retentive faculty (*Retentrix*) is for retaining not for expelling; the moving faculty (*Motrix*) is for moving, not for reasoning; the reasoning faculty (*Ratiocinatrix*) is not for cooking down, or sensing; the visual faculty is for seeing, not for hearing; the hearing faculty is for hearing, not for touching. Thus, it follows for individual faculties that any faculty does not perform the operation of another, nor can it act in any way, unless they are from among the faculties which serve by cooperating in the operation of [another faculty] which they serve. This is true of all faculties but especially those which are disparate among themselves (following Fernel, see above) and have no correspondence among themselves, such as natural faculties and vital faculties, vital faculties and animal faculties, animal faculties and natural faculties, which have no correspondence among themselves as natural faculties have among themselves and animal faculties have among themselves. In this way, therefore, natural faculties are not able to obstruct the vital functions, nor are vital faculties able to obstruct the animal functions, and, as follows, animal faculties are not able to obstruct the natural faculties nor to cooperate in any way in their operations. [5] Whence, since imagination is an animal faculty, it cannot cooperate in the formative operation which is a natural faculty with which it has no correspondence.

[6] Against this, it is not enough to say that imagination causes some things in the fetus and cooperates in the formative operations by arranging that formative power by means of exemplary images, (as was said by Thomas Fienus,† *De virib. imag. quest. 14. concl. 45. & quest. 15. concl. 46*) because imagination has no authority over the formative operation in such a manner that, by commanding that formative operation, it might make it form in this, and not in any other, way. But, even if we say that the imagination, by either commanding or arranging, makes this, it would be necessary that the formative faculty (*Formatrix*) sense the command and recognize the direction of a superior faculty, so that it could be able to operate according to those exemplary

* Jean François Fernel was a sixteenth-century French physician whose contributions to physiology were greatly respected in the early modern period. His major work, *Physiologia* (originally called *On the Natural Part of Medicine*) provided a detailed anatomy of humans based on humours, temperaments, innate heat, spirits and the faculties of man.

† Thomas Fienus was a seventeenth-century medical and surgical writer. He was born in Antwerp but studied in Bologna under Mercurialis and Aldovandus. In addition to “*De viribus imaginationis*,” he wrote another tract on the formation of the foetus, “*De vi formatrice foetus*.”

images, through which the imaginative faculty (*Imaginatrix*) directs it to operate, and thus it will require the formative faculty to have another power, and also the virtue of cognition, by which it knows, or, at least, that it knows through itself. [7] To this difficulty, the response of the abovementioned Thomas Fienus concerning this cognition does not suffice, namely, that cognition is two-fold, one part which is true cognition pertaining to the cognitive powers, and another part which is the natural cognition that the animate parts of the body and plants recognize, which, through this cognition, draw to themselves what is appropriate to themselves and even expel, I say, what is inappropriate. It says that it suffices that images represented by the imagination are recognised by the formative faculty through the natural cognition so that they operate according to their likeness. But, I respond that, besides the fact that this natural cognition is induced for no reason, since all which operate naturally may not operate through any cognition but rather by the necessity of nature, nevertheless, granting this natural cognition, this would follow in those things which are in agreement with it according to its nature, not however in those which not only are not in agreement with its nature but which are most fully inconsistent, because they destroy the operations of nature. [8] Therefore, this nature should have been corrupted altogether if the formative faculty, by recognizing, by some cognition, alien images, destructive to its work, which had been presented to it by the imagination, nevertheless, admitted them into its operation, since it ought to repudiate and reject against this because it is given by nature that all parts and natural virtues expel from themselves those things which are alien and contrary to themselves.

Secondly, images represented by the fantasy to the formative faculty intervene either as material in the formation of members and of an animal, or as an instrument for forming that member and that animal, but not as material, because, in the presentation of the fantasies, the bare images of things are represented, but in monsters not only are the images of things impressed but also the very substances of the members are changed, as can be seen. Thus, these images are unable to provide to the material since they are purely spiritual. How, therefore, are those images changed into the material of the fetus? How do they put on the color? How do they have the same dimensions as the body? How do they take on the other corporeal qualities? [9] Therefore, images of this sort are not able to enter into the formation of the members, and of an animal, as the material. Neither can they act as an instrument because the instrument does not communicate its form to the creation. Thus, the individual faculties require their own instruments for their

actions to be carried out (Galen, *lib. 1 de Caus. Puls. Cap. 4. & alibi: Fernel. Lib. 5 Physiol. Cap. 14 et alibi*). Thus, these fantasies or images will intervene as either the instrument of the formative faculty or of the imaginative faculty. But [they cannot be said to be the instrument] of the formative faculty, because they are not the proper instruments of the formative faculty. Nor [can they be said to be the instruments] of the imaginative faculty, because, then, it would be true to say that “the imagination formed,” which is altogether false, since it does not have the proper instrument for forming, nor can it be used by another, therefore, it is not able to form in any way.

[10] Third, if imagination cooperates with something else in formation, it acts either alone and by itself or in conjunction with the formative function. [It does not act] alone, for then it could form, which is in no way possible nor is this disputed by anyone. And [it does not act] together, because then there would be a confusion of all things, if the power of the faculty operating by accident were greater than faculty operating by the power of nature. And it would be possible for the faculty which operates by accident to form the foot of a beast whereas the faculty that operates by the power of nature had intended to form the foot of a human. But, this ought not to be said because nature avoids confusion, and it does not permit one faculty to perform the function of another. Thus, I think that the effects that we attribute so easily to imagination are more imaginary than real, and probably have other natural causes, more appropriate to themselves, from which they are produced.

[11] Fourth, the formative faculty, as soon as it begins to form, is always in operation and never rests (Galen *Lib. de fet. format. cap. 5*). How then can it be true that imagination, the power, without a doubt, which is unable either to form according to its own nature, or to know how to form, and which, whether in an instant or even in a short time, is unable to direct the formative faculty by representing its fantasy, so that, nevertheless, such a fantasy might form a fetus, is more powerful and stronger than the formative faculty, which forms according to its nature and is always in operation? Why do we not admit freely that intellective power, nay rather, I say, the will of man, is more able to direct the formative faculty than the imagination? For, indeed, these are active, but the imagination is a passive power and receives and retains only fantasies derived from the senses.

[12] Finally, although, as the contrary opinion says, imagination frequently impresses its fantasy on the foetus in the hour of its conception, it is certain that the fantasy can only be received in the

seed, for nothing is formed in the beginning of conception that is not from the seed. It is fitting therefore, that only the spermatic parts be altered by that fantasy through the imagination. But, on the contrary, we can see rather that the sanguineous parts are altered, and often we have seen the fleshy parts and muscular parts to be changed, and to put on another form.

From these things, when the imagination and the defects of seeds are removed from the [list of] causes of these monsters, it remains only that we might suspect the mixture of seeds of diverse species. Whence, this woman who gave birth to the monster described by you is suspected by me of a wicked sexual act. And, in order to elicit the truth of the matter, one should follow these clues to the last. But, in her defense, we might first say that the generation of this monster ought to be blamed on the nature of the region, for you yourself acknowledge that the island of Sicily is fertile ground for such monsters. Or, secondly, we might say that this birth was a type of uterine mole, and what this woman reported about the barking was rather imagined, and it was rather from fear that the fetus seemed to her to bark. This is confirmed by that opinion, which argues that uterine moles are generated from feminine seed alone with the flowing of blood to the uterus. Therefore, it could have happened that the woman, observing an ass or a dog in the act of sexual intercourse emitted her own seed, conceived, and thence, produced such a monstrous birth although these things do not lack many difficulties.

Be well, and love me, [Zacchia]

* This translation is cited in the article by Francesco Paolo de Ceglia, "The Woman who gave birth to a dog: monstrosity and bestiality in *Quaestiones medico-legales* by Paolo Zacchia," *MEDICINA NEI SECOLI ARTE E SCIENZA*, 26/1 (2014) 117-144.