

Book Reviews

LESTER S. KING, *The philosophy of medicine. The early eighteenth century*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 1978, 8vo, pp. viii, 291, £12.25.

Reviewed by William F. Bynum, M.D., Ph.D., Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP.

By title, Lester King's latest book would appear to complement a work which he published in 1970, *The road to medical enlightenment, 1650–1695*. In that earlier monograph he examined a number of seventeenth-century physicians and scientists—Boyle, van Helmont, Sydenham, Sylvius, Hooke—whose philosophies were seen to culminate in the eclectic synthesis of Friedrich Hoffmann. Although he never explicitly states it, Dr. King must feel that *The philosophy of medicine* supersedes rather than complements his earlier book. He again covers much of the same ground, Hoffmann becoming simply one of several eighteenth-century figures considered. Boerhaave, Stahl, and Haller are obvious choices for inclusion though minor doctors of the period like James Blondel and Daniel Turner merit discussion when their particular writings illustrate themes which King has chosen to expound. Despite the addition of these and a few other eighteenth-century thinkers, the focus of King's book is still on the seventeenth century and earlier. Daniel Sennert gets a fuller treatment than Stahl; Lazarus Riverius and van Helmont each get as much space as any eighteenth-century physician save Boerhaave.

King's style of exposition will be familiar to anyone who has read *The road to medical enlightenment*. King writes intellectual history and enjoys most of all examining seriatim the basic metaphysical presuppositions of physicians and scientists. In the present work he identifies three pairs of opposites as crucial for his period: nature and the supernatural; materialism and the immaterial; rationalism and empiricism. Particular chapters are concerned with nature, substantial form, iatrochemistry, iatromechanism, the mind/body problem, the imagination, medical explanation, causality, and rationalism and empiricism. In each chapter King considers relevant portions of several individuals' works, seminal thinkers such as Boerhaave receiving short expositions on more than one occasion.

Dr. King is a careful scholar and many of his discussions—particularly of Continental thinkers—are illuminating. However, the topical organization is occasionally disorienting and a concluding summary chapter would have helped the reader understand how philosophical preoccupations had changed between 1660 and 1740, the rough boundaries of King's "early eighteenth century". Considering the book's general sophistication, some of King's attempts to make earlier philosophical concepts intelligible to the modern reader are needlessly condescending. He spends over a page speculating how Agamemnon might explain a motor car, and his discussion of Osler's views on micro-organisms as causes of disease does not serve much purpose. The Hippocratic writings are consistently treated as if they were all written by a man named Hippocrates.

These are minor irritations, but they underscore the fact that *The philosophy of medicine* is useful in its parts but disappointing as a synthetic account of the metaphysical foundations of early eighteenth-century medicine.