CARTER, Richard B., *Descartes' Medical philosophy: The Organic Solution to the Mind-Body Problem.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Medicine, Medical theory and the therapeutic relationship between the doctor and the patient have exercised a very great influence on philosophers and philosophical thought for nearly 2000 years. The notions of 'health' and 'illness' have very often been directly related to dominant metaphors in political philosophy. From the days of Alcmaeon of Croton who saw illness as coming about due to imbalance of powers or as *Monarchia,* to the days of Virchow, the father of anatomical pathology, who saw politics as nothing but medicine applied on a grand scale – the influence of medical thought on political philosophy is unmistakable. Equally, the suffering caused by illness and disease have been a source of continuous inspiration for philosophers to reflect about *condition humaine* leading, for example, the Greek culture to posit health as one of its four ideals. The therapeutic relationship lead Cicero to reflect about the nature of human relationships, contrasting the medical relationship to friendship and elevating the former above the latter. Many philosophers, from the renaissance to the enlightenment and beyond, were either themselves physicians or enormously close to them or were greatly influenced by medical theories of their time. The growth of modern science, the parallel craze for witch-hunting in that period of European history and the uneasy relationship of the former with the hermetic and the iatro-chemical tradition are themselves rooted, to some extent, in the nature of medical theories and institutions of that period. And yet, paradoxically enough, our standard histories of philosophy hardly mention it. Except for some occasional pieces in specialized journals like *Medical History, Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* etc., the standard text-books in philosophy give the impression that a Locke or a Descartes can be understood quite independent of their medical philosophies. Richard Carter's book under review, *Descartes' Medical Philosophy,* and Patrick Romanell's *John Locke and Medicine* are, I hope, tokens of a changing time. May be, what at the moment appears to be a trickle will soon turn into a deluge. We could do with some heavy showers.

Was medicine and medical theory important to Descartes himself ? Here is what he says, in 1637, at the end of part VI of *Discourse on Method* : "I have resolved not to use the time left for me to live in any way other than to try and acquire some knowledge of nature of such a kind that one can draw from it rules for medicine more firm than those which have been attained upto the present; and I shall say that my inclination so strongly removes me from any other kinds of designs... that if any occasions constrained me to busy myself with other designs, I do not believe that I should be capable of succeeding in them." (Carter's translation, p. 7)

Eight years later, in a letter to William Cavendish, Descartes writes: "The preservation of health has always been the principal end of my studies". (ibid.).

Citing these two passages, Carter says "(t)hat these two passages should have largely escaped generations of Descartes' interpreters is truly astonishing" (ibid.). One could not agree more.

Whatever the reasons that lead to this astonishing situation, some of which Carter touches on later, contemporary philosophical scholarship resembles the following picture when it comes to Descartes : "... the historians of philosophy ans science generally do realize his importance as a founder of mathematical analysis, and they agree that the tradition of rationalism received much of its characteristic flavor from his thinking. They do not, however, ask how these two are related, beyond a few words concerning scientific method, nor do they often ask why the same man who was a fundamental theorist in medicine and in mathematical physics also claimed explicitly that the *goal of all his work* was to establish *an ethics based* on these two disciplines" (p. 20, *my emphasis*).

The goal that Carter sets up for himself is to justify d'Alembert's "assessment of Descartes as a revolutionary founder of a new ethical order" (p. 22) by positing medicine as a link that joins cartesian physics to his ethics.

It is simply not possible for me to summarize in the course of this review, the arguments that Carter constructs in defence of this view. What I shall do is, therefore, to sketch the broadest outline of his thesis which, I sincerely hope, will provoke the reader into reading the text himself.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, Carter attempts to establish the link that exists between medicine and general sciences within Descartes' philosophy. Insofar as human beings are a unity of a thinking mind with a living body, they are able to mathematically understand the nature of bodies as such. This knowledge of such an unqualified, general body *(res extensa)* is a presupposition for a knowledge about concrete, particular unified bodies such as ourselves. The next step in the argument, says Carter, is to show that the human knower, as a unity of mind and organized body, is uniquely in a position to know the world precisely in order to preserve its biological life *i.e.*, to preserve its union of mind and the organized, particular body. The knowledge of organized bodies, or human beings as objects of scientific knowledge, is itself accessible to the knower. Consequently, medicine is considered as belonging to sciences generally; it is itself part of general sciences but restricted by the nature of the objects it studies.

In the second part of the book, Richard Carter attempts to show how the general science of Descartes, namely, the theory of the formation of heavens functions as a model for both the embroyogenesis of the human body *and* the genesis of a healthy, civic body. Insofar as human body is so organized as to

carry out the computations and solutions of the mind, Medicine as a science helps to keep the body in the required state of organization. The necessity for a rational ethics within such a framework must be obvious by now: what medicine is to the unity of thinking and living body, is ethics to the corporate body, that "body politic" in which all human beings live. Descartes' physics gets joined to his rational ethics by way of the science of medicine. At the end of the second part, Descartes does indeed begin to emerge as a revolutionary figure, a man who was a "leader of a band of revolutionaries" as d'Alembert put it.

On the whole, I think Carter succeeds admirably in presenting us a unified picture of Descartes' *oeuvre* than the one we are normally used to in history of philosophy. I cannot think of any work other than that of Popkin on *The History of Skepticism* which contributes as much to our understanding of Descartes as Carter's book. He deserves rich praise for this.

This erudite book with many illustrations and copious footnotes is a required reading for a wide variety of people: Historians and philosophers of medicine, historians of philosophy, Cartesian scholars, political and moral philosophers, sociologists of science and, in fact, for just about anyone who is interested in acquainting him/herself with the scope and reach of Descartes' thinking. By rescuing a picture of Descartes as his contemporaries knew him, but since then fallen into disuse, and by doing it so competently, Carter has earned the gratitude of those to whom such things matter. One looks forward to further writings from the exciting pen of the author of *Descartes' Medical Philosophy*.

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