

SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND THE AIMS OF INQUIRY

After its unparalleled rise and expansion over the past century, medicine is increasingly criticized both as a science and as a clinical practice for lacking scientific rigor, for contributing to overmedicalization, and for failing to offer patient-centered care. This criticism highlights serious challenges which indicate that the scope and societal role of medicine are likely to be altered in the twenty-first century. Somogy Varga's ground-breaking book offers a new perspective on the challenges, showing that they converge on fundamental philosophical questions about the nature and aim of medicine. Addressing these questions, Varga presents a philosophical examination of the norms and values constitutive of medicine and offers new perspectives on how to address the challenges that the criticism raises. His book will offer valuable input for rethinking the agenda of medical research, health care delivery, and the education of health care personnel.

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A Philosophical Analysis

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Preface and Acknowledgments

The impetus for this book was born out of an increasing awareness of what appears to be intensifying criticism of modern medicine. After what many regard as the “golden age” of medicine in the twentieth century, prominent figures now maintain that medicine has entered “the age of disappointment.” Medicine is increasingly criticized as a science and as a clinical practice for lacking proper scientific rigor, contributing to overmedicalization, and failing to offer compassionate, patient-centered care. The criticism highlights serious challenges to medicine which indicate that its scope and societal role are fated to be altered in the twenty-first century. Such a critical threshold provides fertile ground for addressing fundamental questions about medicine, and this book takes on such a task.

The book illustrates that the criticism and the challenges it conveys converge on fundamental, philosophical questions: What is the (scientific) nature of medicine? What is the aim of medicine? The book offers a systematic philosophical examination of these questions, persuaded that such an undertaking carries the potential to assist in the approaching deliberation about the future of medicine. It defends three theses about the nature and aim of medicine (the *Systematicity Thesis*, the *Understanding Thesis*, and the *Autonomy Thesis*) that illuminate norms and values constitutive of medicine. The theses enable us to assume the *Moderate Position* with respect to the challenges, which offers a better comprehension of the problems, points toward possible solutions, and helps to rethink the proper boundaries of medicine and the appropriate use of medical means.

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