

Book Reviews

MARJORIE GRENE and EVERETT MENDELSON (editors), *Topics in the philosophy of biology* Boston and Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1976, 8vo, pp. xiii, 454, \$39.50 (\$19.50 paperback).

The editors contend, with justification, that the physical sciences have, until now, predominated in the philosophy of science. However, an increasing amount of work is being carried out in the philosophy of biology so that the balance of power is now being redressed. This volume contributes to the realignment by presenting eighteen essays, which indicate an expanding philosophical understanding of nature; it is interesting that all but two of the authors are American. They have all appeared elsewhere, and one might perhaps be critical of this increasingly popular American custom of publishing material more than once, despite the obvious convenience of having a collection of articles on a theme rather than seeking them in a wide variety of publications.

The anthology is divided into five parts: 'History'; 'Reducibility'; 'Problems of explanation in biology'—levels of organization, function and teleology, pluralistic explanation; 'Evolution'; 'Species problem'. These historical and methodological topics are discussed skilfully, thoroughly, and in historical context where appropriate. They will be of the greatest interest and value to historians of the medical sciences, as well as to the historian of biology.

Supplementing Professor Grene's volume on *The understanding of nature*, (reviewed in *Med. Hist.* 1975, 20: 213), the present book will stimulate further work in the conceptual problems which are basic to the biological sciences. It deserves wide attention.

HARCOURT BROWN, *Science and the human comedy. Natural philosophy in French literature from Rabelais to Maupertius*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, (London, Canada Books), 1976, 8vo, pp. xx, 223, illus., £10.50.

The random development of the attitudes and aspirations of French scientists between the Renaissance and the Revolution, and their influence on French literature is the theme of this book. The author has selected Rabelais and Voltaire to represent men with well-defined scientific interests, and scientists Pascal and Maupertius who discussed ideas in literary forms. Much of the material has appeared elsewhere but has been revised for this book.

Professor Brown is eminently suited for this inter-disciplinary study and he traces through four centuries French writers who experienced the scientific and then the industrial revolution. It is only natural that they should be affected by these events and a consideration of their reactions is essential for adequate appraisals of such writers. The scientific component in the literary and imaginative products during these centuries provides some of the necessary evidence. Science, being a human activity, is shared by all and must be taken into account by historians of all aspects of human endeavour.

The chapter 'Pantagruel and health' (pp. 19–43) will be of special interest to the historian of medicine, together with several other parts of smaller dimensions. Professor Brown's scholarly work is an important contribution and may induce others to study additional aspects of his theme.