

Book Reviews

DONALD J. D'ELIA, *Benjamin Rush: philosopher of the American Revolution*, from *Trans. Amer. philosoph. Soc.*, 1974, New Series, vol. 64, part 5, 4to, pp. 113, \$5.00.

Rush is remembered for his medical activities and his contribution as a revolutionary patriot to the genesis of America. About the second of these we know less, and Professor D'Elia, an historian, now provides a scholarly analysis of it. By so doing he supplements the earlier studies of H. G. Good (1918), N. G. Goodman (1934), Shryock (1945–1946), George Corner (1948 — the autobiography) and L. H. Butterfield (1951 — the letters).

He is able to show that Rush was indeed an outstanding philosophical exponent of the American Revolution. His revolutionary mission was basically Christian, and its uniqueness was his belief that revolution and Christianity were not incompatible. For him the Revolution was in fact an episode leading to a new utopian order in which Christianity could flourish among free men. His great achievement was that his revolutionary ideology revealed more originality than that of other contemporary American leaders.

This new work adds not only fresh interpretations of Rush, but also of the Revolution, which we commemorated last year.

[MARSILIO FICINO], *The letters of Marsilio Ficino*, volume I, London, Shephard-Walwyn, 1975, 8vo, pp. 248, £6.00.

Ficino (1433–1499) was head of the Platonic Academy of Florence and one of the most influential men of the Renaissance, providing it with its most potent intellectual and spiritual inspiration and acquainting it with the deep significance of the Platonic tradition. He is, therefore, a vital figure in the essential background to any study of Renaissance science and medicine. The letters form a very important part of Ficino's writings and the first group of 131 are presented here, translated from Latin and covering the years 1457 through 1476. A few refer to medicine or related topics; one is entitled, 'The nobility, usefulness and practice of medicine' (pp. 127–130). It is interesting to note that Ficino's father was physician to Cosimo de Medici, and that he himself was a confirmed vegetarian. The letters are annotated where necessary and there is a useful appendix of brief biographical accounts of his correspondents. Further volumes are promised, and together they will form an outstanding contribution, which no student of the Renaissance will be able to neglect.

FRED ROSNER, *Sex ethics in the writings of Moses Maimonides*, New York, Bloch, 1974, 8vo, pp. x, 129, \$7.95.

A great deal has been written recently on Maimonides (1135–1204) the codifier of Jewish law, but this book tackles a new aspect of his writings. First, there is a biographical introduction, then Maimonides' *Treatise on cohabitation*, with a bibliography of it, followed by excerpts concerning sex selected from eleven additional books, many of which have been published in translation already.

This is a useful anthology of Maimonides' contributions to sex, which range from hygiene and therapy to rape, bestiality and punishments for sexual misdemeanours, and derive mainly from Ancient Hebrew and Greek practices. It is a scholarly work which will be of wide interest.