

Book Reviews

ERIC T. CARLSON, JEFFREY L. WOLLOCK, and PATRICIA S. NOEL (editors), *Benjamin Rush's Lectures on the mind*, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1981, 4to, pp. xix, 735, \$15.00.

Eric T. Carlson, is well known for his studies in the history of psychiatry. With various associates – Patricia Noel, Meribeth Simpson, and Jeffrey Wollock – he has produced many valuable studies on Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), and his edition of Rush's *Two essays on the mind* (1972) was particularly useful to students of the origins of concepts of the psychopathic personality.

Benjamin Rush was a man of many firsts: the first native-born American psychiatrist; the author of the first American textbook of psychiatry (1812). Similarly, he has been referred to as the father of American chemistry, and a leading supporter of the anti-slavery movement and of education for women. By his involvement in the first public dispensary, he became a leader in the fight against alcoholism and diseases of poverty. Although Rush's main contributions were not theoretical ones, we owe to him the term “phrenology” and perhaps “tranquillizer”.

After initial studies in America, Rush was a pupil of William Cullen at Edinburgh during 1766 and 1767 when Cullen, as Whytt's successor, was to give his first lectures on the Institutes of Medicine. It was most probably here that Rush obtained the same neurophysiological emphasis towards the Institutes as shown by Whytt and Cullen. After a short time in London and Paris, Rush returned to Philadelphia where he became Professor of Chemistry in 1769. In 1791, he was appointed Professor of the Institutes of Medicine at the newly-named University of Pennsylvania. Today, we would probably regard the Institutes as the elements and principles of physiology. Rush's course continued for about nineteen years and the book we have here is essentially his lecture notes on physiology, psychology, and physiological psychology, with the many corrections and amendments introduced over the years.

The book is beautifully edited, with detailed introductions and guides to the text. In addition, the copious notes and potted biographies are a wonder to behold for their sheer erudition and fascination. No name, topic, or drug passes without comment and clarification from the editors. The work of putting the manuscript together, with the addition of notes and sources (even from Rush's own library books), must have taken years of effort. The largest portions of the lectures are concerned with “animal life” (about 110 pages), “the nervous system” (about 150 pages), and “lectures upon the mind” (about 250 pages). As an introduction to the psychology and physiological psychology of the eighteenth century it could scarcely be bettered.

Rush's own comments and the notes and introductions show the breadth of his reading and his wide acquaintanceships. Clearly, he was much indebted to his fellow religious materialist, David Hartley, but he had also read Erasmus Darwin, Condillac, and Cabanis. We also see the thoughts of a man of medicine and a man of the world, the friend of Priestley and Franklin, Jefferson and Adams. One of his two sons, James (1786–1869), came to Britain, and studied under Dugald Stewart and Thomas Brown in Scotland. Even more materialistic than his father, we have in James Rush one of the very early behaviouristically inclined American psychologists.

This is a book full of insights and valuable scholarship and for such a large and interesting book it is a real bargain. The following brief extract from the closing parts of Rush's text will illustrate the breadth and style of the man and his ideas:

I will not say that every disease is a compound of body and mind; but I will say there is scarcely a general disease in which you will not derive great advantages from a knowledge of the history of the mind; and that those physicians will always be the most successful in curing diseases, who cull in the avenue of the mind as one of the channels through which they are conveyed into the body, or conveyed out of it (p. 683).

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