

## Book Reviews

WILLIAM H. HUFFMAN, *Robert Fludd and the end of the Renaissance*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988, 8vo, pp. xii, 252, illus., £30.00.

Robert Fludd's encyclopaedic publications with their lavish and fascinating illustrations have frequently been seen as the keys to an intellectual world we have lost. His *Metaphysical, physical and technical history of each cosmos, the macrocosm and the microcosm* (1617–21) and his *Mosaicall philosophy* (1659) seem to promise comprehensive and reliable guides to the "occult mentality" of the Renaissance. For the author of this book, for example, "Fludd's unique and important accomplishment was to produce in his works a grand summation of Renaissance Christian Neoplatonist thought, which encompassed two millenia of ancient, medieval and Renaissance traditions in the arts, sciences and medicine in a religious and philosophical context" (p. 3). Unfortunately, as Fludd's polemic with Kepler shows, there were some major aspects of Christian Neoplatonism which Fludd simply did not understand and prominent features of Fludd's philosophy which were anathema to other Neoplatonic thinkers. Fludd was not, therefore, as representative of Renaissance thinking as Huffman and earlier writers on Fludd would have us believe. Where Kepler and other Neoplatonic thinkers tried to discern in the so-called "Book of Nature" the attributes of its divine author, Fludd preferred a more mystical and theosophical way to gaining knowledge of his god.

The distinction between Neoplatonic natural philosophy and theosophical Neoplatonism is itself in need of careful exposition since it is by no means obvious or clear to the modern reader. Huffman, however, does not provide it. Indeed, Huffman's book is surprisingly vague about its subject. "A weird alchemical tale" told by Fludd is mentioned as a means of pointing to one of Fludd's friendships with "great men" (p. 29) but the story itself is not deemed worthy of repetition; we are told that "No one has investigated Fludd's astrology" and that it cannot be examined here either (p. 199), but we are not told why not. Although we are given a quick summary of Fludd's "Mosaicall philosophy" (pp. 100–34), the author clearly expects the reader to make the best he can of it; there is little or no explanation of what it means or why Fludd felt it was important to say it. Although there is a brief and highly derivative account of Renaissance Neoplatonism, there is no discussion of Renaissance music theory to help the reader understand Fludd's proposed cosmic harmonies. We are told that Fludd experimented "extensively" in medicine (p. 22) but are not given one single example. We learn that Fludd's metaphysics "differed greatly" from that of contemporary Galenist physicians but we are not told in what way, and that, in spite of these differences, Fludd remained a Galenist in his medical practice, but we are not told why (p. 22). In fact, it seems true, if sad, to say that our understanding of Fludd and his context is not advanced one bit by this book.

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ANDERS BRÄNDSTRÖM and LARS-GÖRAN TEDEBRAND (eds.), *Society, health and population during the demographic transition*, Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1988, 8vo, pp. 514, SKr 215.00.

This elegantly-produced volume contains the proceedings of a conference with the same title held at Umeå in Sweden in 1986. The papers are grouped according to the conference sessions which were on: Infant, child and maternal mortality; Causes of death and classification of diseases; Urban disease and mortality; Society and medicine; Health and nutrition; and Changes and patterns in rural mortality. Most of the contributions are based on Scandinavian data but they include a summary of Knodel's long-standing work on German villages, a stimulating paper by Kearns suggesting ways in which the changing scale of the English urban population may have concealed important changes within national mortality rates in England, an ultimately inconclusive piece by Jean-Pierre Goubert on French water supply, and several other less significant contributions. Also included are the introductory statements of the session commentators. Some of these are little more than off-the-cuff reactions to papers received at the last minute and it is a pity that even a brief summary of what must have been lively discussion sessions is omitted. Some of the commentators made fairly damning criticisms of certain papers