

March 1999 (Volume 40, Number 1)

Importance of Philosophy of Science to the History of Medical Thinking

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Popular approach to the history of medicine rests on naive assumptions that: 1) only the present state of medical knowledge can be counted as scientific and only those elements of the former knowledge and practice which fitted the body of contemporary science should be regarded by the historians of medicine (presentism); 2) medical sciences, like the other natural sciences, portray natural phenomena as they really are (naturalism); 3) progress in sciences consists of cumulative growth of information and explanation. The twentieth century philosophical critique of science revealed that none of these assumptions were true. Empirical facts, which are taken as a basis for any true knowledge, are dependant on the presumed theories; theories are intertwined into a broader socio-cultural context; theory-changing processes are caused by social factors rather than by the theoretical content. Therefore, it is a common task of historians of medicine and philosophers of science to reveal all theoretical and cultural premises on which our comprehension of the contemporary medicine is founded.

Key words: education, medical; ethics, medical; health education; history of medicine; medical education; modern medicine; schools, medical