

‘This book offers a novel view of the nature and aims of medicine, which is deployed to defend medicine from excessive scepticism while respecting and developing the challenges that medicine faces today. It is an important contribution to the philosophy of medicine.’

Jacob Stegenga, *Professor of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge*

‘This excellent book offers a careful and insightful analysis of the nature and aims of medicine. It is unique in positioning medicine in relation both to science and to ethics, and it systematically dismantles extreme stances on medicine while offering stances that are simultaneously moderate and novel.’

Alex Broadbent, *Durham University*

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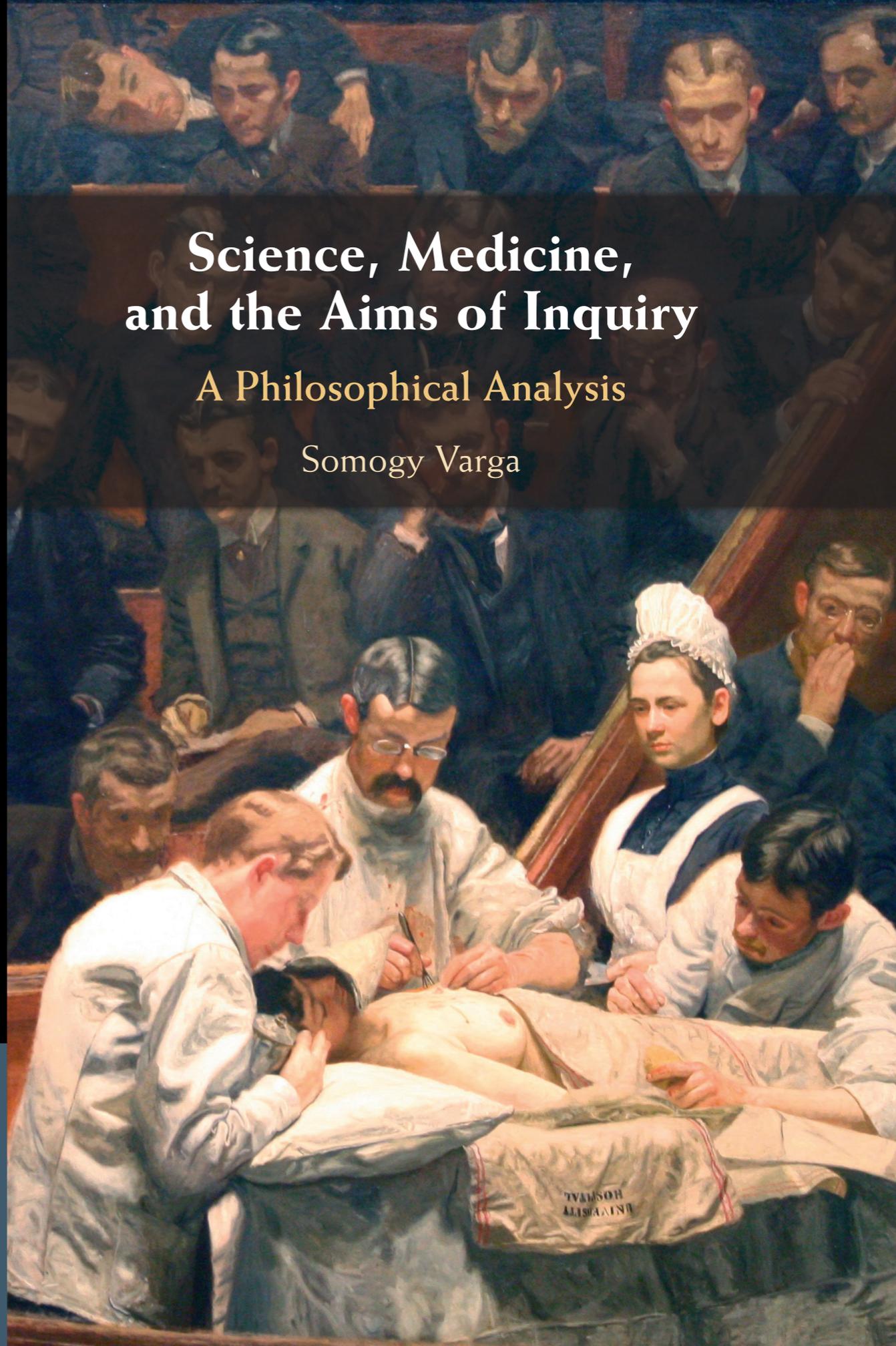
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Varga
Science, Medicine, and the Aims of Inquiry

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A Philosophical Analysis

Somogy Varga



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SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND THE AIMS OF INQUIRY

After its unparalleled rise and expansion over the past century, medicine is increasingly criticized both as a science and as a clinical practice for lacking scientific rigor, for contributing to overmedicalization, and for failing to offer patient-centered care. This criticism highlights serious challenges which indicate that the scope and societal role of medicine are likely to be altered in the twenty-first century. Somogy Varga's ground-breaking book offers a new perspective on the challenges, showing that they converge on fundamental philosophical questions about the nature and aim of medicine. Addressing these questions, Varga presents a philosophical examination of the norms and values constitutive of medicine and offers new perspectives on how to address the challenges that the criticism raises. His book will offer valuable input for rethinking the agenda of medical research, health care delivery, and the education of health care personnel.

SOMOGY VARGA is Professor of Philosophy at Aarhus University, Director of the Center for Philosophy and the Health Sciences, and Senior Research Associate in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg. He is the author of *Scaffolded Minds* (2019), *Naturalism, Interpretation, and Mental Disorder* (2015), and *Authenticity as an Ethical Ideal* (2011).

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Contents

<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction: Medicine at the Crossroads	I
I.1 The Road to Medicine's "Golden Age"	1
I.2 The Criticism of Medicine and the "Age of Disappointment"	3
I.3 The Aims of the Book	5
I.4 The Structure of the Book	7
I.5 Final Remarks	14
I Challenges to Medicine at the End of Its "Golden Age"	16
I.1 How Medicine Became the Patient	16
I.2 Skepticism	18
I.3 Overmedicalization	23
I.4 Objectification	26
I.5 The Character of the Criticism	29
I.6 The Use of the Criticism	34
I.7 Conclusion	37
2 Toward a Normative Philosophy of Medicine	38
2.1 Introduction: Philosophy of Medicine	38
2.2 Normative Philosophy of Science	40
2.3 Normative Philosophy of Medicine	45
2.4 Three Objections to Continuity	47
2.5 Conclusion	55
3 Science and Medicine: The Systematicity Thesis	57
3.1 Introduction	57
3.2 Problems with Demarcation	59
3.3 The Deflated Approach	61
3.4 Incompleteness and Systematicity	62
3.5 Medicine and Systematicity	72
3.6 Systematicity and Demarcation	74
3.7 Limitations	77

3.8	The Science versus Scientific Argument	79
3.9	Conclusion	83
4	Inquiry in Medical Science: The Understanding Thesis	85
4.1	Introduction	85
4.2	Aim and Constitutive Aim	86
4.3	Truth, Knowledge, and Understanding	87
4.4	Understanding as the Aim of Inquiry	90
4.5	Progress: Knowledge or Understanding?	92
4.6	A Difference in Kind?	95
4.7	Conclusion	104
5	Understanding in Medicine	106
5.1	Introduction	106
5.2	Knowledge and Types of Understanding	107
5.3	Grasping Explanations	109
5.4	Objectual Understanding	110
5.5	Understanding Disease	113
5.6	Clinical Understanding	122
5.7	Conclusion	130
6	The Aim of Medicine I: The Autonomy Thesis	132
6.1	Introduction	132
6.2	Cure and Treatment	136
6.3	Medicine Is Sanocentric, but Not Necessarily Pathocentric	140
6.4	Health: Two Puzzles	147
6.5	Positive Health and Well-Being	150
6.6	Sanocentricity, Health, and Autonomy	153
6.7	The Autonomy Thesis and the Overinclusiveness Objection	158
6.8	The Autonomy Thesis and the Second Overinclusiveness Objection	159
6.9	Conclusion	162
7	The Aim of Medicine II: Current Alternatives	163
7.1	Introduction	163
7.2	Edmund Pellegrino	163
7.3	Alex Broadbent	166
7.4	The Hastings Center Report	169
7.5	Bengt Brölde	172
7.6	Howard Brody and Franklin G. Miller	175
7.7	Christopher Boorse	177
7.8	Conclusion	182
8	Rethinking the Challenges: The <i>Moderate Position</i>	183
8.1	Returning to the Criticism	183
8.2	Skepticism, Systematicity, and Well-Orderedness	184
8.3	Overmedicalization	191

<i>Contents</i>	vii
8.4 Objectification	199
8.5 Conclusion	203
Conclusion: Disorientation and the “Greatest Benefit to Mankind”	205
C.1 “Doom and Gloom”?	205
C.2 The Main Points	207
C.3 The <i>Moderate Position</i> and the “Greatest Benefit to Mankind”	210
<i>References</i>	212
<i>Index</i>	230

Preface and Acknowledgments

The impetus for this book was born out of an increasing awareness of what appears to be intensifying criticism of modern medicine. After what many regard as the “golden age” of medicine in the twentieth century, prominent figures now maintain that medicine has entered “the age of disappointment.” Medicine is increasingly criticized as a science and as a clinical practice for lacking proper scientific rigor, contributing to overmedicalization, and failing to offer compassionate, patient-centered care. The criticism highlights serious challenges to medicine which indicate that its scope and societal role are fated to be altered in the twenty-first century. Such a critical threshold provides fertile ground for addressing fundamental questions about medicine, and this book takes on such a task.

The book illustrates that the criticism and the challenges it conveys converge on fundamental, philosophical questions: What is the (scientific) nature of medicine? What is the aim of medicine? The book offers a systematic philosophical examination of these questions, persuaded that such an undertaking carries the potential to assist in the approaching deliberation about the future of medicine. It defends three theses about the nature and aim of medicine (the *Systematicity Thesis*, the *Understanding Thesis*, and the *Autonomy Thesis*) that illuminate norms and values constitutive of medicine. The theses enable us to assume the *Moderate Position* with respect to the challenges, which offers a better comprehension of the problems, points toward possible solutions, and helps to rethink the proper boundaries of medicine and the appropriate use of medical means.

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Despite the challenging circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, during which significant portions of this book were written, I was fortunate to present parts of this work to various audiences. Thanks to audiences at Durham University, University of Pittsburgh, University of California San Diego, University of Memphis, Södertörn University, University of Toronto, McGill University, and my graduate students at Aarhus University. I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with these diverse groups in discussions about various aspects of the book. Some of the material in the book is significantly based on articles that have been published in journals. Thanks to the publishers for the permission to use material from the following pieces: “The Aim of Medicine. Sanocentricity and the Autonomy Thesis,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (2023) 104: 720–745; “The criticism of Medicine at the End of its ‘Golden Age,’” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* (2022) 43(5–6): 401–419; “The Continuity of Inquiry and Normative Philosophy of Science,” *Metaphilosophy* (2021) 52 (5): 655–667; “Understanding in Medicine,” *Erkenntnis* (2023) doi.org/10.1007/s10670-023-00665-8; “Medicine as Science. Systematicity and Demarcation,” *Synthese* (2021). 199(1–2): 3783–3804.

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