

**John Marenbon, ed.** *Continuity and Innovation in Medieval and Modern Philosophy: Knowledge, Mind, and Language*. Oxford University Press 2013. 150 pp. \$55.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780197265499).

This edited collection of papers—delivered at the Dawes Hicks Symposium, and held at the British Academy in 2011—is Marenbon’s latest effort to make the case for the study of medieval philosophy to a non-specialist audience. His strategy on this occasion is to encourage the contributors to link medieval thinkers to those of the early modern period by focusing on the continuities between the periods, as well as the innovations—hence the title of the collection. That there are innovations will not be particularly surprising given that we are used to the idea that there is a breach between medieval and early modern philosophy. That there are important continuities is more newsworthy, and the contributors duly oblige Marenbon by identifying interesting, important, and less commonly known instances of the common ground uniting two periods usually thought by non-specialists to be radically discontinuous. So we have Dominik Perler placing Descartes’ rejection of faculty psychologies in its scholastic context, with Descartes presented not so much as an innovator but as following the lead of Ockham in developing a form of dualism. Martin Lenz argues that Locke’s philosophy of language is best seen not as a novel (and hopeless) form of internalism, as commonly thought, but as a sophisticated form of social externalism that builds on Aristotelian semantic theory. And finally, Robert Pasnau suggests that Western thought from Aquinas through to Locke is united against Islamic and Jewish thought on the issue of esotericism, i.e., the view that certain forms of knowledge should not be communicated to the entire community but confined to a privileged circle of specialists. The idea in each case is that the early modern period is better understood when we see it as continuing strands of thought that originate in the Middle Ages. Each piece is followed by a response, with Andrew Pyle, Michael Ayers, and John Hawthorne respectively doing the honours.

Underlying all of these papers is a theme now close to the heart of many medievalists, namely Jacques Le Goff’s *longue durée* of the Middle Ages. The idea here is that the standard division between medieval philosophy on the one hand, and renaissance and early modern philosophy on the other, is misguided and artificial, it being impossible to properly understand a Locke, Descartes, Spinoza or Leibniz without seeing them as participants in discussions over a millennium old. Le Goff’s claim is that the Middle Ages do not end conveniently in 1500, but, depending on one’s topic, may continue well beyond the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On this view the first truly modern philosopher is arguably Kant, not Descartes. And if one focuses on social and economic issues, the Middle Ages last right up to the Industrial Revolution. Apart from the inherent interest of this historical thesis, the theme of the long Middle Ages is rhetorically powerful for Marenbon, for it allows medievalists to say to specialists of the early modern period still to be convinced of the value of studying the scholastics: ‘You’re really a specialist in late medieval thought, and you would do well to familiarize yourself with the early stages of your own period’.

To give a reasonable sense of how this project is carried out this review will focus from here on in on the first of the contributions. The collection kicks off with Perler’s examination of Descartes’ philosophy of mind, specifically his critique of faculty psychology. This is a good topic for the collection because we tend to think there are sharp discontinuities between medieval and modern thought to be found here. Moreover, one is likely to think that if Descartes is following in anyone’s footsteps in this domain it would be those of Plato and Augustine, not those of a scholastic. Perler upsets these expectations. The interest of Perler’s paper lies in showing that Descartes’ starting point in the philosophy of mind is actually a particular strand of scholastic Aristotelianism.

Perler begins by drawing out the contrasts between the quintessential scholastic, Suarez, and the poster boy of the early modern period, Descartes, on the question of the ontology of the faculties of the soul. Suarez maintains that the faculties are separate entities with their specific roles to play in the life of the mind, each under the supervision and governance of the soul. It is this picture that Descartes rejects. More specifically, Perler presents Suarez and Descartes as disagreeing on three key theses. (1) *The multiplicity thesis*: Not unlike modern day modularity theorists, Suarez posits a good number of faculties - the rational faculties (divided into the intellectual and volitional faculties), the sensory faculties (again sub-divided according to the various sensory modalities), and the vegetative faculties. This is unacceptable to Descartes. By his lights it is not the rational faculty or vegetative faculty of the soul which does this or that, but the soul as a whole which acts. (2) *The divisibility thesis*: Each of the faculties, according to Suarez, is separate and really distinct from each other and the soul. The soul is thus a unity by aggregation only. While Descartes is happy to posit a real distinction between the soul and the body, he is unwilling to countenance any real distinction in parts of the soul which would compromise its unity. Finally (3) *the inaccessibility thesis*: According to Suarez we have no direct or immediate cognitive access to the soul or its faculties. What we do have immediate access to are the soul's activities. These activities are explained by appealing to the notion of various faculties underlying and generating those activities, and the soul is then postulated as the bearer of those faculties. Thus, on the Suarezian account, the soul is a theoretical entity integral to our best account of mental activities. Of course Descartes will have none of this, insisting instead that we have direct, non-inferential cognitive access to our souls, and we that know our own souls with greater certainty than anything else.

This summary of the differences between Suarez and Descartes on the soul nicely brings out how decisively Descartes rejects Suarez's faculty psychology. And if one were unaware of other scholastic thinkers, one might labour under the impression that Descartes has broken with Scholasticism. After all, Suarez wrote the *Metaphysical Disputations*, and this work is often described as a compendium of Scholasticism itself. Perler's contribution outlines why this would be a grave misunderstanding. The basic reason is that not all scholastic authors agreed with Suarez. What is more, there were scholastics who broke with the Suarezian position whose positive views bear more than a passing resemblance to those of Descartes. In particular, Ockham rejects much of the thinking that would eventually form Suarez's faculty psychology, and these rejections lead to the development of a theory of the soul that anticipates much in Descartes. The moral of Perler's story is that Descartes does not break wholly new ground in the philosophy of mind. Rather Descartes takes sides in a long-running Scholastic debate, stands with Ockham against Suarez, and develops the nominalist's lines of thought. It is the lack of familiarity with the Scholastic debate which creates the illusion of novelty we find in Descartes.

Perler then traces Ockham's break with the faculty psychology associated with Scotus, and considers Ockham's developed views on the soul with those of Descartes. The first move is a break with a fundamental Thomist thesis, one shared by Suarez, viz., that there is only one substantial form in human beings. This, as it happens, was an innovation introduced by Thomas, and not particularly well liked by Thomas' predecessors or many of his contemporaries. The key idea here is that there is only one substantial form, and so there is only one soul in a human being, this one soul having various faculties that account for the vegetative, sensory and rational activities associated with humans. Contra Thomas, Ockham claims that there are in fact three forms in a human being: a form of corporeality (making the body the kind of body it is); a sensory form that accounts for our vegetative and sensory activities; and a rational form that is responsible for acts of thinking and volition. The

key point for present purposes is that, for Ockham, the sensory and rational forms are really two distinct souls. The main argument offered for this claim is that one and the same thing cannot have contradictory properties, and since the sensory soul is a 'natural' cause (i.e. a deterministic cause) while the rational soul is never a natural cause but is always a free cause (able to give its assent, give its dissent, or remain neutral), the two souls must be distinct (*Quodlibetal* II, q. 10). (Illustration: When hungry a human cannot but desire appetizing food when it is placed before them. This desire is produced in a deterministic fashion by the sensory soul. But even in such a situation one remains free to eat the food, refuse the food, or remain neutral with respect to the food because the rational soul may or may not choose to eat the food. Two such different attitudes to the food cannot be housed in the same entity, according to Ockham, and so the sensory and rational soul must be distinct.)

Interestingly, Ockham never gives an argument for the claim that the rational soul is a free cause. He takes it to be a brute fact, and Descartes will follow suit, describing a free cause in exactly the terminology used by the nominalist. But more importantly, what we see in Ockham is a form of soul-soul dualism that reappears in Descartes as a body-soul dualism. The difference between Ockham and Descartes is confined to how the various activities have been distributed, much in Descartes now being attributed to the mechanistic processes of the body, with the intellect and will, as with Ockham, allotted to an immaterial soul. The key point of agreement is that the activities of the intellect and the will require a different seat from those of the sensory and vegetative activities.

But the real distinction posited between the sensory and rational souls is not to be extended to the faculties themselves. The other key nominalist move, repeated by Descartes, is to reject the real distinction between the various faculties, and between the faculties and the soul itself. Rather than being real things which 'flow from the soul', Ockham insists that the terms 'intellect' and 'will', while intentionally distinct, are extensionally equivalent. In Ockham's terminology, the terms 'intellect' and 'will' both signify primarily the soul, but both have a secondary signification, 'intellect' signifying secondarily the acts of thinking of the soul, 'will' signifying secondarily the volitional acts of the soul. The acts themselves are distinct, but the soul performing them is a single unified thing. The fundamental breach with Suarez is on the scholastic adage 'action follows being'. Suarez maintains that each type of activity requires its own principle of operation. Ockham rejects this: 'there is a single substance of the soul that is able to have distinct acts (*Reportatio* II, q. 20)'. Ockham never gives an argument for this claim; he simply takes it to be a brute fact that the soul is able to perform both volitional and intellectual acts, and then uses semantic theory to explain away linguistic inconveniences. Descartes again follows suit, using 'as'-locutions to describe the soul as thinking when generating concepts or as willing when assenting or dissenting. He writes: 'As for the faculties of willing, of understanding, of sensory perception and so on, these cannot be termed parts of the soul, since it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions (*Sixth Meditation*)'.

Perler presents Ockham as adopting a dualist and a reductionist stance when giving his account of the ontology of the faculties. And Descartes does exactly the same. He concludes: 'If one looks at [the intellectual landscape in which Descartes and other early modern authors developed their own theories], one realizes that the problem of the ontological status of the faculties is not a distinctively early modern problem. It is rather a problem which early modern philosophers inherited from their predecessors and which they tried to resolve by using models that had already been developed in scholastic debates (34)'.

What is the value of knowing this history? The advantage of knowing the Scholastic origins of this debate, or any of the others discussed in this collection, is that the assumptions that motivate positions that reappear in the early modern period are more clearly visible. And it is much easier to produce a satisfactory understanding of the issues involved in any of these positions if the underlying assumptions are clearly in view. Surely this is sufficient grounds to motivate any scholar of the early modern period to consider looking further back in the historical record the better to understand their own chosen period.

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