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Review of *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy* by Dan Kaufman (ed.)

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Abstract:

A review of Dan Kaufman's (ed.) recent book *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

Keywords: Seventeenth-century philosophy

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Kaufman, Dan, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018. 592 pp. \$220 (hbk). ISBN 9780415775670.

Reviewed by NICHOLAS JOLLEY

In the past twenty years or so the major publishers have competed with one another to produce surveys of the early modern period in philosophy. The trend seems to have been initiated by the *Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, which appeared in 1998, and it shows no signs of abating. *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy* is the latest volume of this kind to appear, and it is worthy to be set beside the best in the field. Dan Kaufman has assembled a distinguished international team of scholars for the volume; in general, they have risen admirably to the task of acquainting the reader with the philosophical themes of the period in a way that takes account of modern scholarly developments.

Like the *Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, the *Routledge Companion* is organized thematically. Beginning with an essay on the Scholastic background the volume then turns to metaphysics and proceeds through all the major areas of philosophy; the organization is both lucid and sensible. And the coverage of major philosophical topics is by and large comprehensive. There are perhaps only two significant omissions. The part of the volume devoted to metaphysics includes excellent essays on substance (Tad Schmaltz), qualities (Samuel Rickless), causation (Sukjae Lee), and free will and determinism (C.P. Ragland), but there is no essay on space and time; thus, the reader will find no discussion of the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence. Strictly speaking of course this is an eighteenth-century debate, but since other late works of Leibniz are covered, chronology cannot be the ground for the exclusion. Also, the topic of identity in general and of personal identity in particular tends to get rather short shrift; Locke's theory of personal identity is briefly discussed by Steven Nadler in his admirable survey of seventeenth-century theories of consciousness. It may be said that debates over personal identity only really get going at the end of the century; even so, Locke's famous treatment addresses issues concerning personal immortality and the possibility of resurrection that were of great moment to his contemporaries. And the topic of diachronic identity in general was certainly one that attracted the attention of the best minds of the age. In *De corpore*, for instance, Hobbes makes an important contribution to the theory of identity that strikingly anticipates Locke's insights in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

The selection of philosophical topics for inclusion is fairly traditional; by contrast, the choice of individual philosophers to be covered is decisively stamped by recent developments in scholarship. One striking sign of the times is the amount of space that is devoted to women philosophers such as Margaret Cavendish and Mary Astell. In the past women were assigned at most walk-on parts in volumes of this kind; their voices were heard, if at all, simply as critics of the famous theories and arguments advanced by their male contemporaries: Princess Elisabeth's objections to Descartes on mind-body interaction are an obvious case in point. Now, women philosophers are treated by some contributors as creative thinkers in their own right. Whether the views of figures such as Cavendish and Astell really deserve to be set beside those of Descartes and Locke is an issue on which readers will want to make up their own minds; contributors such as David

Cunning and Marcy Lascano provide materials for allowing them to do so.

The coverage of individual philosophers is admirably inclusive. Nonetheless, there is an understandable tendency among some contributors to play to their strengths. In his essay "Logic and Knowledge," Alan Nelson offers a penetrating and challenging analysis of Descartes's views that deftly incorporates Nelson's influential solution to the problem of the Cartesian circle, but he leaves himself rather short of space to discuss the views of Locke, Leibniz, and others. Yet no contributor entirely forgets his or her brief of writing about the period as a whole, as opposed to some personal favourite among the great philosophers. Sometimes part of the interest of the essays comes from seeing what a contributor will make of a philosopher with whom he or she is not generally associated. Thus, Lex Newman writes insightfully about Malebranche's theory of ideas against the background of issues posed by Descartes's teachings; in my view, however, he fails to bring out the point that Malebranche is set apart from the Cartesian tradition by his conception of ideas as abstract entities rather than as mental items.

One way in which the contributors to the volume tend to differ among themselves is in the balance that they strike between basic exposition and critical engagement with the major issues of interpretation. Steven Nadler, for instance, is one of the contributors who are nearer the interpretative end of the spectrum: he introduces the reader to such thorny exegetical problems as that of interpreting Spinoza's theory of ideas of ideas. Other contributors, such as Gianni Paganini, Deborah Brown, and Susanne Sreedhar, have written essays that are largely expository. To comment on the expository character of some contributions is not, however, to say that they are necessarily less valuable than those that engage in the interpretative debates. Sreedhar, for instance, gives an excellent overview of the main contours of seventeenth-century political philosophy which admirably brings out its Janus-faced character. She shows how backward-looking divine right theories compete with forward-looking contractualist theories in the market place of ideas, while also noting some of the crosscurrents. It is surprising, however, that a scholar who has written a distinguished book on Hobbes should say that he has served mainly as a "foil" (489). Hobbes has always been, and perhaps will always be, a controversial figure, but he has also been a major positive influence in some areas, such as the philosophy of law.

Readers of this journal will be pleased to hear that Locke is generally well served by the contributors. He is well served in terms of the quality of the contributions and the amount of space devoted to his thought on particular topics. The contributions on qualities, theories of ideas, and free will and determinism all assign a prominent place to Lockean views and discuss central problems of interpretation. Rickless helpfully explains why Locke thinks that secondary qualities would disappear if perceivers were annihilated. Newman addresses vexed issues concerning the taxonomy of ideas in the *Essay*; in particular, he addresses the issue of whether Locke comes to abandon the view that all ideas are either simple or complex, and reaches the conclusion that he does not. Ragland admirably discharges the formidable task of guiding the reader through the intricacies of Locke's chapter on power (*Essay*, II.xxi). In this essay, he is able to exploit the advantages of placing Locke's views against the background of those of Hobbes and argues that Locke comes to move from a Hobbesian event-causal picture to an agent-causal picture.

Two of the contributions that give prominence to Locke's views call, I think, for more extended comments. In her essay on arguments for the existence of God, Marcy Lascano discusses Locke's apparently leaky version of the cosmological proof; this is an argument

that may seem especially embarrassing when set beside the more sophisticated proofs offered by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. Lascano rightly draws the reader's attention to the invalid move from "something exists at every time" to "there is some particular thing that exists at every time" (510). She then argues that it is useful to turn to Locke's essay "Deus" for a better understanding of his thought on the issue. She observes that, for Locke, theist and atheist are agreed that some one thing has existed from eternity: "Locke's aim in the cosmological proof is to give reasons for thinking that the eternal thing is knowing immaterial substance, or God, rather than senseless matter. Locke seems to have taken this context for granted in the *Essay*, assuming that his interlocutors would agree that some one thing—either God or the universe of senseless material substances—has always existed" (510). Lascano's appeal to the essay "Deus" to throw light on Locke's intentions is indeed helpful. It explains why Locke is in such a hurry, as it were, to get to the stage of the proof where the existence of an eternal being has been established. But readers looking for a defence of Locke against the charge of invalidity will be disappointed.

Antonia LoLordo's treatment of Locke in her admirably clear essay "Theories of Sense Perception" is the other case that calls for some comment. LoLordo writes provocatively that Locke thinks "we can take it for granted that sense perception is an accurate guide to the world" and that he "is almost entirely unconcerned with sensory error" (300). It seems to me that these claims are too sweeping. Surely one of the anti-Scholastic lessons that Locke wishes to teach in the *Essay* is that the manifest image is not a reliable guide to the nature of physical reality: those who are unacquainted with the corpuscularian hypothesis mistakenly suppose that ideas of secondary qualities resemble those qualities in bodies (*Essay*, II.viii.15). It is true that Locke is not much interested in puzzles concerning perceptual variation and illusion that fascinated the skeptics and Descartes himself at the skeptical stage of his project. But this fact about Locke's interests needs to be set in a wider context: it can be explained by seeing that his theory of knowledge is not an attempt to refute skepticism but to advance an epistemology of the sciences. He wishes to distinguish those disciplines, like mathematics and ethics, in which we can achieve certainty from those in which we must rest content with something less, namely probability. This seems to be one of those cases where Locke's views on individual topics cannot be understood apart from the nature of his overall project in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

The volume has been very well produced, but there is one problem for the reader: the system of references is inadequate. The volume would have benefited from the inclusion of an overall list of abbreviations of the sort that has become standard in the secondary literature. Because of the absence of such a list, those who are largely new to seventeenth-century philosophy will be frequently puzzled about what is referred to by "AT," "CSM," "NE," and the like; in a number of contributions, these abbreviations are left unexplained. Also, in his contribution, Andrew Pyle refers the reader to an editor's introduction that, sadly, does not exist. In spite of these cavils *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy* is an excellent work that will prove a valuable resource for students and scholars alike.

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