

Margaret Cameron, ed. *Philosophy of Mind in the Early and High Middle Ages: The History of the Philosophy of Mind. Volume 2*. Routledge: London and New York, 2018. xvi + 287 pages. ISBN: 9781138243934.

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This book is the second volume in a six-part history of the philosophy of mind that is designed to cover the entire history of philosophy, from antiquity to the present. Although some of the chapters focus on individual thinkers, the volume is organized thematically so that each chapter addresses its topic independently. The topics range from mental perception, intellectual cognition, and abstraction through freedom of the will, passions, and metaphysics of the soul to morality, immortality, and questions of selfhood. I found the thematic scope historically representative – indeed, the only striking absence was that of a chapter on intentionality. This is particularly surprising, given that Franz Brentano’s (d. 1917) seminal discussion of the phenomenon explicitly recognized a debt to the scholastic tradition.

The volume’s historical scope ranges from Boethius (d. 524) to John Duns Scotus (d. 1308), the end date being due to the division of labor between this and the third volume, which covers the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The publisher’s point of view is understandable, for including later figures would have inflated the book considerably and the inquisitive reader can always be advised to purchase this volume in tandem with its sequel. Nevertheless, editorial decisions can easily be read as implicit statements, which the editor seems to recognize when she says that “[i]t would be a great mistake to think that the years covered by this volume mark off any natural period in intellectual history” (2). From a historical point of view, the cut at the end of the book is indeed abrupt and makes little sense. The modification of Aristotelian principles that leads to more radical departures by “late medieval” thinkers like William Ockham (d. 1347) or Jean Buridan (d. ca 1358) is already well on its way in the period covered here, and one

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risks missing this continuity by spreading the story between different volumes. But perhaps the third volume, which I have not seen, diminishes the risk by making careful cross-references to the present volume.

On a more serious critical note, this volume follows the old Latinocentric understanding of medieval philosophy, which means that Islamic philosophy is covered only to the extent that it contributed to the development of philosophy in Latin. The “two towering figures” (2) of Avicenna (d. 428/1037) and Averroes (d. 595/1198) are the protagonists in this contribution, a situation that misrepresents Averroes’ importance in his endogenous context. As should be well known by now, Islamic discussions in the philosophy of mind developed in parallel during the entire medieval period, albeit with important differences. While there may be plausible arguments for confining the investigation to the history of European development after the Arabic interlude, the complete silence on the fact that such a confinement is an active choice made by the historian reflects an attitude that should now be acknowledged as outdated. The editor does refer to the burgeoning secondary literature on Avicenna’s later influence in the Islamic world in her introduction (n. 7), but only in passing, and, to be frank, she presents no argument whatsoever for this confinement. The same concerns Jewish philosophy, represented here by Moses Maimonides (d. 601/1204), and Byzantine philosophy, which is not mentioned at all.

Such omissions are particularly unwarranted in a series designed to study both the continuities and the discontinuities in the history of philosophy, and this especially in terms of their potential capacity to illuminate contemporary discussions.¹ If rigorous study of this history is important because we want to know why some questions arise in certain contexts but not others, and if the absence of a modern problem in a pre-modern context may provide new grounds for showing how the problem results from debatable *modern* assumptions, then the broader our territory of medieval philosophy is, the more likely we are to be able to make this contribution. And if the history of philosophy is pursued for the sake of the contribution it can make to contemporary philosophy, then arguably there are developments in Islamic philosophy that are unparalleled in Latin philosophy and therefore of intrinsic interest. To point to just one such case, Islamic philosophy witnessed the emergence of a radically process-oriented – or, according to some interpreters, four-dimensionalist – theory of substance, and thereby of the mind, in Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1635-36). As far as I know, this development has no parallel in Latin thought.

1 See the general editors’ introduction (pp. ix-xvi).

Going into the individual chapters following the introductions, Margaret Cameron's article on mental perception in Peter Abelard's (d. 1142) work opens the book. Cameron explains how Abelard develops a theory of the mind's attention and judgment in perception from the inheritance of Augustine (d. 430) and Boethius. Although her focus is on the perception of universals, she does mention other applications, among them the mind's capacity to think of incorporeal, and thereby imperceptible, objects, such as the rational soul or God. According to Abelard, the mind is capable of attending to distinct features in its objects of perception and of considering each object *in abstracto* as just the bearer of this or that feature. Alternatively, the mind can represent incorporeal things to itself as if they were perceivable objects, which enables it to perceive similarities between things and thus to generate universal concepts that are grounded in the natures of concrete things.

David Piché's article studies the late thirteenth-century debate about whether the intellect can conceive particular things by tracing the emergence of a new, un-Aristotelian theory that endorses this possibility. This theory comes into full bloom during the fourteenth century among thinkers like Ockham – a point at which the abrupt end of the book's historical scope is especially acute.

Richard Taylor's article is a balanced assessment of the controversy between abstractionist and emanationist interpretations of Avicenna's epistemology. He sides with Tommaso Alpina's "collaborationist" view, according to which the active intellect is required to provide the sciences with a secure foundation. This amounts to a moderate form of emanationism; however, the more general perspective is a welcome addition to the narrower scope of many earlier contributions to the debate. Taylor also suggests that Themistius (d. *ca* 390) was an especially important source for Avicenna's epistemology. Unfortunately, this claim is somewhat sketchy and no clear explanation of exactly what he adds to our understanding of Avicenna is provided.

In a detailed study of Duns Scotus' (d. 1308) concept of freedom, Cruz González-Ayesta shows that for Scotus, will, in the most general sense, is self-determination. This definition encompasses two different types of self-determination: necessary self-determination in the unfolding of the Trinity and, more interestingly for us, radical synchronic contingency in all subsequent acts of both the divine and the created will. Thus, human will is radically free in the sense that in every act of will, the will could choose what it in fact does not choose, for the will is not decisively determined to act by any motive, no matter how strong, the willing subject might entertain.

An intriguing comparative question is why such a radical notion of created never became popular in the Islamic tradition, although many of the background motivations are shared. The radical notion of synchronic contingency is a part of some Ash'arite theologians' understanding of God's will, but few of the thinkers that endorse a robust notion of human responsibility seem to have attributed such a radical freedom to human beings. It is also interesting to note that both of the two types of self-determination Scotus ascribes to God can be found in Islamic philosophy, albeit in diametrically opposed theories. Avicenna, for instance, clearly holds that God's freedom amounts to necessary self-determination, whereas the Ash'arites endorse synchronic contingency in His choice of the creative act.

Some of these questions are addressed in Sarah Pessin's article on Islamic and Jewish discussions concerning the soul, will, and choice. This is another rich contribution that not only paints a broad picture of the context, but also presents an original argument according to which the Islamic philosophers' theory is a kind of compatibilism. One wonders, however, whether comparisons to modern compatibilism really are warranted in a context that does not lay the stakes in as extreme a way as is common modern philosophy, which is marked by the medieval concept of radical self-determination. Can one be a compatibilist if one is not challenged by the radical notion of freedom?

Juhana Toivanen's ambitious article on perceptual experience aims to introduce the reader to the general paradigm within which medieval philosophers developed their theories of perception. According to him, although their most important conceptual tool was the functional analysis of perception into the subtasks performed by really distinct faculties, all medieval philosophers departed from the shared understanding that perceptual experience is unified in normal cases. This shared conceptual space still left room for radically different approaches, the range of which Toivanen admirably illustrates.

Henrik Lagerlund's contribution addresses the theories of passions developed during the thirteenth century. The main focus is on Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), whose theory is contrasted with that of John of La Rochelle (d. 1245). Lagerlund argues that the thirteenth-century theories of passions were largely naturalistic and that considering the passions' submission to reason added a normative aspect to them. This gives rise to the question of whether the thirteenth century was really that different from antiquity in this regard. Did not the Stoics also consider passions as both naturally explicable *and* vicious due to their counterproductive effect on our rationality? Another question is just how representative Aquinas is

of the thirteenth century.² Did more radical voluntarists, like Duns Scotus, not contribute to the theory of passions?

Kara Richardson's article turns to discuss Avicenna's and Aquinas' critically different theories of the active intellect: Avicenna postulated an active intellect superior to human individuals, whereas Aquinas held that it was a part of the human soul. Richardson does not aim at distanced neutrality, but defends Avicenna against Aquinas' critique on the grounds that Aquinas either misconstrued or misunderstood his predecessor's position.

This leads to Andrew Arlig's intricate analysis of the metaphysical question of whether the human soul is one or is comprised of many metaphysical parts. The focus is on Aristotelian philosophers, although alternative views are representatively discussed in relation to each of the problems that Aristotelians face. Arlig argues that the debate emerges from the need to reconcile the overarching intuition concerning the soul's unity with three distinct desiderata: the empirical one of postulating one subject for each distinct psychological act, the metaphysical one of conceiving each human being as a single substance, and the theological one of being able to account for self-subsistence without a body. This problem-oriented approach brilliantly illustrates the stakes in the debate.

Christina Van Dyke's article investigates medieval theories of immortality by placing metaphysical theories in the background and focusing on the medieval mystical tradition, an approach that gives access to exceptionally vivid experiential accounts of what life in the hereafter will be like. While I find it welcome to consider our sources broadly, this chapter is not entirely free of methodological pitfalls. In particular, how do we guarantee the historical reliability of our interpretations of the mystical authors as philosophers, given that this arguably entails reading against their immediate intentions? How do we guarantee that we are reading their philosophical thoughts and not just reading philosophy *into* their texts?

Peter Eardley's contribution treats two rival explanations of morally deficient acts. In Aquinas' moral psychology blameworthy acts are due to the lack of knowledge, whereas Henry of Ghent's (d. 1293) voluntarist theory attributes responsibility to a will that is free from the intellect's beliefs. Ultimately, however, the rival theories overlap because Henry's will is hardwired to will beatitude when this is conceived correctly – and isn't the will then simply governed by knowledge? This question nicely illustrates the problem inherent in radical conceptions of

2 Cf. John Marenbon, "Why We Shouldn't Study Aquinas?" Unpublished manuscript for the Aquinas lecture delivered at Maynooth University in March 2017. Available online at https://www.academia.edu/32902867/Why_we_shouldnt_study_Aquinas (retrieved Dec 20, 2018).

freedom: Either our volitions are determined by what we know, which undermines our responsibility (how could we ever have *chosen* not to know better?), or our freedom is radically independent from our beliefs. But if the latter is true, then our volitions become completely inexplicable and akin to chance events.

The volume is concluded by John Marenbon's ambitious article on medieval conceptions of selfhood, which focuses on a teleological or normative concept of the self as the goal of our moral and intellectual development. In his somewhat polemical terms, this is a "self without subjectivity." Marenbon does not flatly deny the existence of medieval concepts of subjectivity, but he does claim that the normative concept was more prominent during the Middle Ages, even in those thinkers who have been held to endorse a concept of experiential subjectivity, such as Aquinas.

As interesting as Marenbon's claim is, it is not entirely unproblematic. Let me illustrate this by a brief look at his treatment of Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 581/1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. In the allegory, Ḥayy undergoes a *fanā'* 'an *nafsihi* at the culmination of his intellectual and moral development. This, according to Marenbon, shows that Ibn Ṭufayl's concept of self is one without subjectivity. Although this might seem a natural interpretation, it is by no means obvious, for texts of medieval moral psychology, Islamic, Christian, and Jewish alike, can be mined for a range of different descriptions of self-relations. And while these may never have been laid out systematically, it does not seem far-fetched to say that the different uses of reflexive terminology can be understood as signifying different, but not necessarily incompatible, notions of self – just as in contemporary parlance. Thus, the *nafs* that Ḥayy discards might simply be a thick notion of self, me as a person with particular character traits, intersubjective relations, and so forth, without this entailing anything about the narrower notion of subjectivity. Unless one completely and permanently dissolves into God, it seems reasonable to speak of a subjective point of view even in *fanā'*. And if this is accepted, then the point can be generalized to other examples of an alleged self without subjectivity, which means that subjectivity need not be an explicit part of a concept of self employed by a medieval author. But this does not entail that the author thereby denied the existence of such a subjectivity or that we should reconstruct their selves as radically subjectless. Can we even understand a radically subjectless selfhood?

As the foregoing description should convey, the individual contributions in this book are generally very good. Some of them manage to function as both introductions to the medieval treatment of their topic and new scholarly contributions in their own right. Thus, notwithstanding my concerns mentioned at the beginning of this review, the book is a valuable entry into some of the central debates in the medieval philosophy of mind.