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PRÉFACE

During much of the twentieth century, a reader could be forgiven for thinking that European scholarship in the history of early modern philosophy and Anglo-American work on the same texts and thinkers inhabited two different, even incommensurable worlds. Continental scholars of Descartes, for example, rarely took cognizance of work being done in North America and the British Commonwealth, while Anglophone Cartesian scholars trained in the mold of analytic philosophy often felt free to ignore French (and German and Italian and Dutch) studies. There seemed to be very little that the one tradition had to learn from or say to the other¹.

Over the past several decades, however, things have greatly changed for the better, as scholars on both sides of the Atlantic (and the Pacific) have not only studied, used and responded to each other's work, but collaborated on monographs, edited volumes, textual editions, even colloquia and conferences.

A parallel and equally welcome development, especially in Anglo-American scholarship, has been an expansion in the range of philosophers deemed worthy of study, now going beyond a small canonical coterie (Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz). French scholars have long valued local heroes such as Pierre Gassendi and Nicolas Malebranche, and these two figures have lately received their due in English as well.

1 In general, it seems that during this period authors writing in English were more likely to refer to French literature than vice versa. In his *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons* (2 vols., Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1952), Martial Gueroult cites not a single English-language book or article. While there are very few references to non-English literature among the essays in Willis Doney's early and much cited collection *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), several well-known Anglophone studies tend to be more cognizant of European work: for example, Margaret Wilson, *Descartes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), and Anthony Kenny, *Descartes* (New York: Random House, 1968). Still, it was long the case that one could publish an article on Descartes in a respectable English language philosophy journal without taking any notice of French or other sources.

But more research than before is devoted to the wider spectrum of seventeenth-century thought, including thinkers once dismissed as “minor”: Louis de la Forge, Géraud de Cordemoy, Arnold Geulincx, Johannes Clauberg, Antoine Arnauld and Claude Clerselier, among others. Anglo-American work has also become more ecumenical in its philosophical interests and more contextualized in its approach—in a word, more European—with scholars attending not just to theses and arguments in metaphysics and epistemology, but also to problems in philosophical theology, natural philosophy and moral philosophy, as well as to the broader philosophical, historical, political, scientific and religious milieux. At the same time, European scholars have become more comfortable with the kind of analytic work that has characterized the training of Anglophone historians of early modern philosophy. All in all, this international convergence in interests and methods has yielded wonderful scholarly fruit.

Still, it is a difficult challenge to both engage in textual/historical research on seventeenth-century philosophy *and*, at the same time, bring to bear on it relevant recent work in analytic philosophy without falling into anachronism. This is why it is so striking when a study comes along that navigates this challenge so effectively. With *L'Empreinte cartésienne. L'interaction psychophysique, débats classiques et contemporains*, Sandrine Roux succeeds admirably in this regard. Indeed, her work can serve as a methodological lesson on how to incorporate contemporary work in systematic philosophy with historically sensitive analysis and assessment of early modern philosophical writings. Rather than trying to “translate” the early modern material into a contemporary analytic idiom—and a good deal typically gets lost in such translation—Roux uses the conceptual tools of the philosophy of action and contemporary debates in the philosophy of mind to make sense of various lines of argumentation in the Cartesians without departing from their own, historically embedded terms. This is just the right way to go about doing this kind of trans-historical work, and it succeeds in illuminating what are sometimes regarded as highly puzzling lines of reasoning in early modern discussions of causation and mind-body relations.

Roux’s study covers a broad selection of Cartesian thinkers: Descartes, of course, but also La Forge, Cordemoy, Arnauld, and Malebranche, as well as, to a lesser degree, Geulincx, Régis and others. This is not done

in a cursory or summary way; rather, Roux subjects the claims and arguments of these philosophers to close scrutiny. Thus, what could possibly be a superficial survey turns out to combine both breadth and depth. Indeed, what Roux provides is a thorough and nuanced discussion of certain central aspects of Cartesian analyses of causation. She certainly illuminates the similarities and important but often ignored differences among Malebranche, La Forge, and Cordemoy, to whom, she notes, “*la notion même d’occasionalisme ne saurait s’appliquer de manière univoque*”. La Forge and Cordemoy, especially, are vastly understudied figures, usually reviewed *en passant* in studies of Malebranche or the history of Cartesian philosophy. Thus, Roux’s dissection of the views they defend and the ways they defend them is a very welcome addition to the large and growing literature on causation in early modern philosophy, one that expands our understanding of origins and nature of seventeenth-century occasionalism and the debates it occasioned.

To take just some examples from Roux’s book:

Recent discussions of La Forge’s theory of causation have tended to mitigate his commitment to occasionalism. One scholar has insisted that in fact La Forge’s “continuous creation” argument, with its apparent conclusion that God alone is causally responsible for the placement of a body relative to other bodies, is meant to apply only to the initial coming into being or creation of that body, but not to its subsequent kinematic behavior². Such a weak reading of La Forge’s occasionalism must therefore downplay the claim in La Forge (and in Cordemoy) that mind-body causation is no more difficult to understand than body-body causation and interpret this to mean that both are equally conceivable and comprehensible on their own terms. Roux shows, however, that La Forge’s intent is just the opposite: namely, to demonstrate that *neither* mind-body nor body-body causation can be clearly understood without reference to God, and that constant conjunction (to use Hume’s later phrase) is often mistaken for causal efficacy.

Then there is Roux’s analysis of La Forge’s claim that, despite the fact that God is the true universal cause of all natural events, one should still “reconnaître les corps et les esprits pour les causes particulières” of the motions of bodies. This should not be read (as some scholars have done)

2 T. M. Schmaltz, “Continuous Creation and Cartesian Occasionalism in Physics”, presented at a conference on occasionalism at the Università Ca’ Foscari Venice, April 2015.

as indicating true causal efficacy in bodies and minds, but simply to underscore their role as *sine qua non* causes. It also allows for a reductive analysis of the notion of “force” and “power” (whereby to say that a body has a “force” to move another or a mind has a “power” to move a body amounts only to saying that God will accomplish the relevant act on the requisite occasion). Roux is absolutely right to say that “*La Forge ne pose pas ici une puissance d’agir positive de l’esprit sur le corps et du corps sur l’esprit ; la thèse d’une action véritable de l’esprit sur le corps ou du corps sur l’esprit est exprimée dans les termes d’une dépendance contrefactuelle*”. Moreover, her reconstruction of La Forge’s position on mind-body causal relations and her revisionist reading of what that implies about what “Descartes should have told Elisabeth” regarding how God causes motion stands as a compelling alternative to other positions on that subject³.

As for Cordemoy, Roux reveals what seems to be really going on in his initial and rather unique argument for occasionalism. She shows that in fact Cordemoy is insisting that we cannot really believe what we take ourselves to be believing when we believe that one body is the real cause of the motion of another body. Her discussion of Cordemoy’s views on body-body and mind-body causation—aided by her conceptual borrowing from work in the philosophy of mind by the American philosopher Jaegwon Kim—is among the most sophisticated discussions of this unjustifiably neglected figure since Jean-François Battail’s seminal study⁴.

Above all, Roux persuasively argues for a diminished and modified role for the “heterogeneity problem”—how could such disparate substances as mind and body interact?—in the motivational origins of occasionalism. With some second-generation Cartesians, there is not really any problem of how mind-body dualism can be reconciled with interaction, which was the difficulty posed to Descartes by Gassendi and Elisabeth. However, Roux argues, the issue of heterogeneity does not disappear altogether, since it informs the way La Forge and Cordemoy reflected on the problematic communication of motion between bodies. She thereby offers yet another important corrective to the old textbook view according to which occasionalism was an *ad hoc* solution to the

3 D. Garber, “Understanding Interaction: What Descartes Should Have Told Elisabeth”, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Spindel Conference Special Issue) 21 (1983): 15-32.

4 *L’Avocat philosophe Géraud de Cordemoy* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

mind-body problem, and even to more accurate reading according to which heterogeneity, while not the dominant motivation for the doctrine at large, continued to play a role in the occasionalist approach to mind-body relations.

Take, finally, one of the more puzzling arguments found in certain occasionalist texts, an argument that is based on a premise according to which knowledge of how to bring about an effect is a necessary condition for being the true efficacious cause of that effect. As Geulincx puts it, “*quod nescis quo modo fiat, non facis.*” The same principle can be found, somewhat less explicitly, in Malebranche’s arguments against mind/body causation. Roux rightly distinguishes two aspects of this argument, which she calls (after Delphine Antoine-Mahut) the “*défaut de connaissance*” argument: one aspect is directed at what one can “do” and another is directed at what one can “will”. Roux’s approach to this causal principle is original and insightful, particularly through her employment of the notion of “basic action”—as elaborated by the American philosophers Arthur Danto and Alvin Goldman—to clarify an important feature of Malebranche’s case for occasionalism (but not, by way of contrast, the arguments of La Forge, who apparently rejects the epistemic premise). Roux shows how the “*défaut de connaissance*” argument works only if the mind’s action of moving the body is “non-basic” (to use Danto’s term). Malebranche would therefore have to reject what might seem to be an intuitive distinction among our actions between those that are basic (moving parts of our bodies) and those that are not (moving or acting upon external things). Roux has recourse to the familiar analogy of “a pilot in his ship” to reveal the conception of the mind-body relationship that is at work in Malebranche’s argument. In this case, however, the model that Descartes used to make sense of the way sensory events occur in the embodied mind is applied to voluntary bodily motions. Roux considers La Forge’s own usage of this image (one that we find with Danto as well) in his argument against animal souls, and suggests that it was La Forge’s argument that inspired Malebranche. With the image of a “pilot in his ship” as a model of action, she proposes a new reading of Descartes’s conception of mind-body union and the manner in which the mind can act on the body.

In this highly original study, Roux has canvassed a number of important texts, several of them woefully understudied; she has brought keen philosophical analytical skills to bear on them, with a careful eye for

distinctions that both clarify and complicate; and she has given us yet more reasons to take seriously figures too often dismissed as “unimportant”. The results of her research are not only of historical significance but philosophical interest as well.

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