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Over the last years, the number of studies devoted to the reception of Descartes' philosophy in the early modern period has significantly increased. There are many reasons for this shift in focus from Descartes' own philosophy to the responses it elicited: some scholars have wished to shed light on the problems left open by Descartes (such as the mind-body union, or the causal link between the two) by means of a study of his earliest reception. In part, the increased attention devoted to the reception of Descartes' philosophy reflects a growing interest in the transmission of knowledge, pedagogy and institutional history at the expense of more theoretical topics. More generally, historians of philosophy, science and ideas are nowadays gravitating towards less trodden paths. In this context, Cartesianism has revealed itself to be even richer and more challenging than previously thought which, in turn, has called for additional investigations into the topic. The history of 'Cartesianisms' – the use of the plural form is quite justified here – is, at present, an especially thriving field of research, and is bound to grow further in the years to come.

The collection of eleven essays edited by Antonella del Prete and Raffaele Carbone is a welcome contribution to this endeavour. The scope of the volume spans from Descartes' own lifetime to the rejection of Descartes' dualism by the medical "School of Montpellier" in the mid-eighteenth century and by the vitalists of the nineteenth century. The essays are arranged into three broad topics – theology, physics and medicine – rather than according to the more usual geographical or chronological order. Yet, a few exceptions notwithstanding, the volume roughly follows the course of history.

The section on theology comprises two essays, one by Antonella del Prete and the other by Wiep van Bunge, both devoted to the United Provinces.

Antonella del Prete's essay (pp. 19-34) examines three pamphlets by Lambert van Velthuysen (1622-1685) published in Dutch between 1655 and 1657 against Jacob du Bois, a Leiden priest who in 1653 and 1655 had attacked heliocentrism. Del Prete reconstructs the context of this polemic, and compares van Velthuysen's and Wittich's strategies to reconcile Descartes' heliocentrism with the Reformed principle *sola Scriptura*. Especially interesting is the correspondence between the two (which is still only available in manuscript form), which shows van Velthuysen and Wittich discussing the best policy to adopt against Descartes' opponents, while downplaying their own disagreements so as not to weaken the Cartesian frontline. Del Prete also points out that van Velthuysen's ultimate intention was not so much to foster Descartes' own cause as to oppose the power of the Calvinist Church over the culture and politics of the United Provinces, an objective that also accounts for his keen interest in Hobbes.

In the second essay (pp. 35-50), the only English-language contribution to the volume, Wiep van Bunge examines *De betoverde Weereld* – “The World Bewitched” (Amsterdam, 1691-1693) by Balthasar Bekker (1634-1698) – a 1,000-page all-out attack on all sorts of superstition relating to “sorcery.” By Bekker's own admission, his assessment of magical, supernatural and preternatural phenomena was largely inspired by Descartes' analysis of prejudices. As for van Velthuysen, in Bekker's case too, Descartes' philosophy turns out to be essentially a means, or, as it were, a weapon, in a much wider and far-reaching cultural and political battle. Van Bunge shows that the explanations by which Bekker intended to account for alleged wonders such as the divining rod were in fact mostly taken from Kenelm Digby, and that his remarks on the interplay between theory and observation have “a definitely Baconian ring” and reflect “the wide established seventeenth-century Dutch fascination with the details of nature” (pp. 44, 47). Bekker's “empiricism” is beautifully illustrated by way of his account of *Exodus* 3:2-3 – the episode of the blazing bush – which strengthens an interpretation already advanced by Koen Vermeir. The essay succeeds admirably in whetting one's appetite for further studies on Bekker's “World Bewitched.”

The section of the volume devoted to physics contains three contributions, devoted to the responses to Descartes' natural philosophy by Pierre Bourdin (1595-1653), Johan Clauberg (1622-1665) and Henricus Regius (1598-1679), which, taken

together, clearly attest to the editors' vision of Cartesianism as an overall European phenomenon rather than as a succession of national affairs.

The long essay by Domenico Collacciani and Sophie Roux (pp. 51-84) examines for the first time the sixteen disputations on mathematics defended at Clermont College under Pierre Bourdin between 1635 and 1653, with special attention given to optics. Collacciani and Roux show that, up to 1640, Bourdin's students were almost exclusively concerned with the anatomy of the eye, following the line of study set out by Platter, Kepler and Scheiner. The first response to Descartes' *Dioptrique* (1637) is to be found in a disputation defended on 30 June and 1 July 1640 by a certain Charles Potier, who attacked Descartes' theory of "subtle matter" as well as his account of the laws of reflection and refraction. As is common in this kind of writing, the true author of the thesis was none other than the person presiding over the disputation; in this case, Bourdin himself, who delivered an opening speech – a *velitatio* (skirmish) – where he further expounded on this line of critique. Marin Mersenne (1588-1648), who attended the defence, sent the disputation plus its preface to Descartes, who hastened to respond to it; the ensuing *querelle* lasted for several months. Collacciani and Roux do not confine their study to this exchange (which has not been studied before in any great detail), but investigate its aftermath in Bourdin's teaching at the Clermont College. They reveal that Bourdin came to accept – or, at least, that he took into account – a few key aspects of Descartes' optics. In a disputation he presided over in 1642, for example, he appears to accept Descartes' way of measuring optical angles. The following year, he asked his students to discuss Descartes' theory of light, which he presented as Aristotle's. One year later, in 1644, he also partly endorsed Descartes' treatment of motion (pp. 71-73). These are splendid discoveries, which prove beyond any doubt how much work remains to be done on the reactions to Descartes' philosophy in colleges and universities, and how much can be learnt from this type of detailed enquiry. Moreover, as regards the specific topic of this essay, it should be kept in mind that – in those very same months in which he was also completing the *Meditationes* – Descartes was also engaged in the discussion of optics with Hobbes and Fermat. Collacciani and Roux's essay confirms the absolute importance of this discipline for Descartes. The article ends (pp. 79-84) with a useful list of these disputations, including an indication of where to find them in French libraries, and with three full-page illustrated tables taken from the disputations (plus a plate by Platter reproduced in Kepler's *Ad Vitellionem Paralipomena* for comparison).

Frédéric de Buzon's essay (pp. 85-108) discusses Clauberg's reworking of Descartes' philosophy in the light of traditional scholastic notions. Its two case studies address the concept of *mathesis* and Descartes' theory of matter. In the *Physica contracta* (1664) Clauberg redefined Descartes' distinction between the "corporeal substance in general" – the one all-embracing *res extensa* – and specific portions thereof, drawing a distinction between "prime" and "second matter." De Buzon rightly points out that the latter term is nowhere found in Descartes' writings, and that the very few mentions of the former occur when Descartes ridicules the notion of a completely formless substratum deprived of any properties as both unintelligible and useless. (I have counted only three such occurrences: two in *Le Monde* [AT XI 33 & 35] and one in the *Epistola ad Vœtium* [AT VIII-B 26]). With respect to this issue, it would have been useful to mention that most Aristotelians at the time held on to a concept of prime matter that was much closer to Descartes than to Aristotle, and in fact much closer to Descartes than Descartes himself was ready to admit. In fact, the *materia prima* of most late scholastics was essentially linked with quantity. To quote Suárez, "materia et quantitas mutuo sese inferunt" [*Disputationes Metaphysicæ* XIII 14, 15; ed. Vivès (Paris, 1861) XXV, 459b-460a. Cf. Eustache de Saint Paul, *Summa philosophiæ quadripartita* (Paris, 1609), *Physica*, I 2, 4, pp. 16-17]. In the case of *intelligible* matter, moreover, the two were expressly identified: "quantitas sola sit materia intelligibilis" [Toletus, *Physica* I 1, 3; *Opera omnia* (Cologne, 1615), IV 8vb]. All in all, Clauberg's move – although certainly remarkable – was maybe less "paradoxical" than it might look at a first glance. In the conclusion of the paper, De Buzon rightly emphasizes Clauberg's attempts to reintroduce the concept of "form" into Descartes' physics, and the influence of that attempt on later thinkers, starting with Leibniz.

In her essay (pp. 109-125), Delphine Antoine-Mahut examines Henricus Regius' psychology. Her main objective is to show that Regius should not so much be conceived as the father of the "Holy Family" of French materialists (as was argued by Karl Marx, and by many others in his wake) but rather as an all-too-radical Cartesian. Regius programmatically subverted Descartes' agenda which wished to ground physics in a "first philosophy." While Antoine-Mahut accepts this view, she sees Regius as merely pushing forward Descartes' own project of disposing of all "substantial forms" by calling into question also the rational soul, which Descartes had granted (p. 119).

The next three contributions blur and enrich the projected threefold structure of the book, as they address topics as disparate as the influence of Descartes' *Passions* on Spinoza or the objections to Descartes' theory of language in eighteenth-century Italy.

The essay by Francesca Toto (pp. 127-161) painstakingly reconstructs Spinoza's understanding of esteem and of related passions such as gratitude, pride, and admiration, as well as "generosity" in terms of a reaction to Descartes' *Passions de l'âme*. Following Voss, Toto rightly insists that Spinoza read the *Passions* in Desmarets' Latin translation, which was not always faithful to Descartes' text and which can be demonstrated to have guided Spinoza's own lexical and conceptual choices (p. 147). According to Toto, the main difference between the two philosophers is that Spinoza – contrary to Descartes – "attributed to gratitude a fundamental ethical role" and in fact even a social and political one (p. 158).

The two essays that follow examine the opposition to Descartes' philosophy on the Italian peninsula. The essay by Manuela Sanna (pp. 163-177) is particularly interesting as it addresses a fairly neglected aspect of Descartes' philosophy, that is, his theory of language and, more generally, of expression. Sanna does so by considering a fairly obscure thinker, Biagio Garofalo (1677-1762), and his *Considerazioni intorno alla poesia degli Ebrei e dei Greci* (Rome, 1707), which were strongly influenced by Spinoza's reading of the *Bible*. Sanna's effort to give space to lesser-known figures and themes is admirable, but translations of the numerous and often lengthy Italian quotations would have been helpful.

Andrea Lamberti's essay (pp. 179-194) is devoted to Antonio Genovesi (1712-1769), who carried out the first Italian translation of Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, together with short pieces by Pierre Louis Maupertuis and Antonio Viviani, under the title of *Scelta de' migliori opuscoli* (Naples, 1755). The critical notes to the text show that Genovesi – like most of his contemporaries – opposed Descartes' views in physics, metaphysics and epistemology (apart from a vague appeal to introspection) and only celebrated him as one of the first advocates of the *libertas philosophandi*.

The three final essays deal with responses to Descartes' views on medicine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with a *coda* on "present-day technosciences."

Roberto Mazzola's "La *vita longa* de Monsieur Descartes" (pp. 195-209) is an enjoyable piece of writing, which examines Descartes' boastful claim that his medicine would enable human beings to live for much longer (reportedly up to five hundred years), the expectations and animated reactions this claim evoked among his

contemporaries, and the reasons for his project's ultimate breakdown. Descartes' project, Mazzola states, was doomed to fail because it remained largely committed to a traditional Hippocratic and Galenic understanding of health and disease, which significantly clashed with the new mechanical physiology he advocated, and which made it unsuitable for therapeutic ends. Mazzola's is an important claim, but the author gives us no evidence in support of it, and instead chooses to consider the present-day "medicine of aging" as a sort of fulfilment of Descartes' dream.

The essay by Sarah Carvallo (pp. 211-240) intends to show how, after Stahl (1659-1734), Descartes became a foil to vitalist physicians and to show the attack on "Cartesianism" as an essentially rhetorical *topos* (p. 212). To substantiate her claim, Carvallo examines Stahl's polemic against Leibniz and Hoffmann (1684-1720), the clash between the "School of Montpellier" and the "School of Paris" (1753-1775) and a journal paper by Claude Bernard of 1875. However, no reasons are given as to why these should count as the "three historical moments" of anti-Cartesianism in modern medicine (pp. 212, 219), and the sudden and unexpected shifts from Halle to France, and from one century to the other, make it difficult to appreciate whether we are in fact confronted with a large-scale phenomenon or just with occasional episodes.

The final essay, by Raffaele Carbone (pp. 241-261) takes us to the France of the mid-eighteenth century. It considers how the terms "physique" and "morale" – employed as substantives – shifted in meaning between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Carbone convincingly shows that this terminological shift reflects a deeper change in the understanding of the human being, which resulted in the establishment of a novel *science de l'homme* in the middle of the eighteenth century. His essay concludes with a case study of this fundamentally anti-Cartesian understanding of the living being, namely the *Specimen novi medicinæ conspectus* (Paris, 1749) and the *Idée de l'homme physique et moral* (Paris, 1755) of Louis de Lacaze (1705-1765), ordinary physician to Louis XV.

The collection of essays edited by Antonella del Prete and Raffaele Carbone does not aim to provide any new general narrative, but nicely enriches the existing ones. . Implicit in the structure of the book – which follows topics rather than nations – is a challenge to the prevailing understanding of Cartesianisms as largely Dutch and French constructions, but this point is likely to escape most readers, and could have been better clarified and made more explicit. The attention to new sources and largely forgotten contexts is a praiseworthy feature. The downside of such a collection, lacking

a unifying topic, is that it is somewhat rhapsodic and mainly suited, as the editors themselves acknowledge in their Introduction (p. 14), to advanced readers who are familiar with the bigger picture of early modern Cartesianisms. These specialists, however, will certainly enjoy a volume so rich in topics and suggestions, and with a number of very fine contributions.

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