

*Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, by Simo Knuuttila. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. Pp. x + 341. H/b £47.00, \$74.00.

The book offers a comprehensive, accurate, and textually supported description of the philosophical views of emotion from the fifth century BC to the fifteenth century AD. The wealth of references to primary sources, coupled with the conciseness in the presentation of numerous theoretical accounts, makes the monograph an ideal point of reference for the study of ancient and medieval approaches to emotion.

The treatise begins with Plato's views on human psychology, followed by a reconstruction of the main claims about emotions in Aristotle's work. The description of the alternative approaches flourishing in the Hellenistic period is well structured, and the presentation of Plotinus's remarks on the subject is refreshingly clear. Exploring the passage from the Classical Greek to the Christian conception of emotions, the chapter on the early Church Fathers is one of the nicest in the book, placing their analysis of emotions in its ethical and religious context, identifying clearly the theoretical presuppositions of the tension between the Alexandrian and Cappadocian schools of thought, and indicating which conceptual solutions as well as problems they handed over to medieval philosophers. The chapter on Augustine marks a gradual change in the book's direction, from a presentation of the various views on emotions to a description of alternative views of human will; that change follows the emergence of new ways of thinking about of the agent's accountability, responsibility, and control over himself. The book's focus is moved from the ethical evaluation of actions, to the meticulous examination of the emotions of the faithful laymen, and of monks who, even if they are unlikely to perform bad deeds, might still sin in thought. Let us note, though, that the constant observance of one's own mental states could not protect the monks from a newly found mortal sin: feeling proud of one's own capacities of introspection. The parts of the book devoted to the late medieval debate between faculty psychologists and voluntarist philosophers are densely written, packed with important information, presenting a systematic reconstruction of the major accounts of the nature of the will, and of the implications of those accounts for the prevalent conceptions of emotion from the fifteenth century AD onwards.

Despite its several virtues, it appears to me that the book has certain limitations that concern not the treatment of particular topics, as much as the methodology employed in a book that purports to combine 'rigorous philosophical analysis with careful historical reconstruction'. What constitutes rigorous philosophical analysis of ancient and medieval texts is of course an issue that resists a simple answer. However, I would suggest that that analysis could

include, at the minimum, the following activities: offering a detailed reading of important paragraphs, with a view to account for the possible ambiguities or inconsistencies in the text under consideration. Following closely upon this—and in practice very often performed simultaneously with it—is the consideration and critical engagement with alternative interpretations of the text, that would lead to the explicit articulation of the reasons why a particular reading is judged as correct, or, at least, preferable, at the current stage of our research. Taking each point in its turn, I should start by noting that the author of the book is a very experienced scholar, and there is no doubt as to whether he has spent considerable time in the meticulous examination of the texts presented in the book. However, that is not the same as to whether the book itself provides us with a philosophically relevant record of the author's research. Detailed textual exegesis is not something that we expect (or, even, should expect) to encounter in a book that aims to cover twenty centuries of philosophical thought on a subject matter, and that addresses, for instance, the Platonic corpus in eleven pages, and the whole of Scotus's and Ockham's writings on mind in eight. However, some parts of that corpus are more important than others, and it would pay philosophical dividends to attempt to analyse some of those parts in more detail.

The book's references testify to the author's knowledge of the conflicting interpretations of almost every text of theoretical importance. Nevertheless, such conflicts are rarely explicated within the main body of the book, and when they are mentioned, it is often in the form of reporting the fact that certain scholars hold different views on an issue, only to move on to the next topic: it would help to see why such differences arise in the first place, which approach the author himself deems as appropriate and, most importantly, *why* he does so. Readers who are already informed of the relevant literature on each topic might of course form their own hypotheses about the possible grounds for the author's endorsement of a particular standpoint, by reading, as it were, backwards from the finished product presented in the book to the possible hermeneutical and philosophical process that led to that product. However, this is likely to provide satisfaction neither to scholars who value detailed textual work, nor to philosophers who would constantly probe for the reasoning behind the interpretative conclusions.

Moving on to the next stage of analysis, the book is, I believe, of interest to anyone currently working in the philosophy of emotions, because it is a book informed by the author's own interest 'in the history of philosophical psychology as philosophy'. I should state, though, that the book is not characterized by an attention to the details of current debates about the nature of emotion. There is hardly any mention of the burgeoning literature of the analytical philosophy of emotions from the early 1990s onwards, while the selective references to authors such as Sorabji and Nussbaum—whose scholarly work constitutes a substantial contribution to the projects of contemporary philosophical inquiry—are mainly restricted to the presentation of their views on

ancient and early Christian texts. To be sure, the discussion of contemporary philosophical theories may not be part of the agenda of a monograph describing the ancient and medieval views on emotions. However, the problem, in my opinion, lies not in the lack of involvement with contemporary theories about emotions, but in the lack of engagement with the object that any philosophical theory in the field, past or present, ought to explore: the domain of emotional phenomena. The description of various philosophical theories about an object—however well informed, lucid, and systematic that description might be—does not by itself constitute a philosophical description either of the theory or of that object. To achieve a philosophical description, we would have to show not only the complicated routes through which one view might lead to another, or that a particular philosopher holds a different account from another, but also which—if any—of those philosophers is justified in his approach, what issues they fail to address, and which aspects of the relevant phenomena they manage to illuminate. However, this is not feasible unless we leave the level of the—admittedly, very difficult—historical reconstruction of intellectual movements, and we plunge to the sea of philosophical debate and argumentation in *propria persona*.

Whatever one might think about the merits of different approaches to the study of history of philosophy, one should certainly admit that Knuutila's book steers with a sure hand over the rough waters of the philosophical debates of ancient and medieval thought.

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