

ourselves in our own times, the contemporary dialogue with the great humanist must lead to a better understanding of the humanist himself. More precisely, Martin wants a firmer grasp of “the precarious independence of Erasmus” (10). An intellectual historian may doubt the extent to which such an approach can help us recover “the intellectual posture and manner of thinking found in the works of Erasmus” (33) without also taking into account, for example, the conventions of the genre to which *The Praise of Folly* belongs; namely, the paradoxical encomium, the typically humanist approach of *Ad fontes*, and the deliberate display of learned humor. All these characteristics are also widely developed by Thomas More in *Utopia*, closely connected to Erasmus’s *Folly*. Remarkably, Martin did not refer once to this work of Erasmus’s friend, in which irony plays so crucial a role.

“Where simplified answers reign, the Erasmian offers complexity” (233). Indeed, I take the liberty of adding one critical layer of complexity to this otherwise beautifully written and original contribution to moral philosophy, to which this study adds more than it does to Erasmian studies.

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Kuni Sakamoto. *Julius Caesar Scaliger, Renaissance Reformer of Aristotelianism: A Study of His Exotericae Exercitationes*. History of Science and Medicine Library, 54. Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy and Science, 26. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. viii + 213. Paper, \$135.00.

Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558) was a natural philosopher and literary theorist whose work was widely discussed throughout the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. After this period, it fell into oblivion, only to be rediscovered during the last three decades or so. His natural philosophy has triggered a series of specialized studies on particular aspects of his thought, especially those aspects that were influential in the development of early modern corpuscularianism. Sakamoto’s book goes considerably beyond such fragmentary approaches and presents central strands of Scaliger’s most important work in natural philosophy, a thousand-page critique of Girolamo Cardano’s *De Subtilitate*, as a systematically integrated whole.

In three chapters, Sakamoto explores issues in Scaliger’s thought that have not yet been discussed by contemporary commentators. In chapter 1, Sakamoto gives an interpretation of Scaliger’s enigmatic remarks concerning Aristotle’s commitment to creation theory and the compatibility of Aristotle’s philosophical theology with the doctrine of the Trinity. Here, Sakamoto traces the sources of Scaliger’s reinterpretation of Aristotle to the tradition of *prisca theologia*, which was usually appropriated by Renaissance Platonism. In chapter 2, Sakamoto studies Scaliger’s qualified rejection of the theory of a world soul—qualified in the sense that Scaliger takes seriously the task of providing an alternative explication of the sense in which the world is a unity. As it turns out, Scaliger’s explication of the unity of the world is connected with another central tenet of his natural philosophy, the theory of a hierarchy of teleologically ordered substantial forms. In chapter 3, Sakamoto delves into Scaliger’s philosophical analysis of the Aristotelian conception of celestial intelligences and the Christian theory of angels—as Sakamoto brings to light, no matter how exotic these issues may appear to be, they were a major influence on Johannes Kepler’s early cosmology. The remaining four chapters take up issues that have already been the subject of more specialized studies: the idea of the best possible world (chapter 3), the conception of void and place (chapter 4), the theory of the generation of living beings (chapter 6), and the theory of mixture (chapter 7). Although there is inevitably some overlap with what other commentators have written, these chapters offer extensive (and reliable) translations of central passages from Scaliger’s difficult text and present a wealth of illuminating co-texts, both from Scaliger’s commentaries on ancient botanical works, and from a wide range of medieval and sixteenth-century authors who influenced him or from whose views Scaliger

distanced himself. Most importantly, Sakamoto uncovers a tight net of argumentative connections that Scaliger draws between the theological and cosmological issues discussed in chapters 1–3 and 5 and the issues that belong more specifically to the behavior of natural particulars.

Sakamoto's book makes a persuasive argument for the claim that, in spite of the seemingly disorganized nature of the hundreds of separate remarks that constitute the *Exotericæ Exercitationes*, Scaliger's thought shows a high degree of coherence and systematic integration. Perhaps the desire for harmonization is carried too far in Sakamoto's reading of Scaliger's theory of mixture, however. Scaliger offers not just one, but two separate treatments of mixture, and while the first claims that "neither forms nor qualities, which have been deprived of their forms, remain" (148), the second claims that "forms that are actualities become potentialities" (155). Sakamoto reads both passages in the light of Scaliger's claim that substantial forms of mixtures can arise through the "mixture of forms" (153–57), and suggests an analysis of the latter idea as amounting to the claim that the forms that have become potentialities "lose their independent existence" and "are integrated into the superior form" (159). While I agree that this interpretation is an ingenious way of reconciling the two accounts of mixture, it may lead to a major inconsistency elsewhere: in Scaliger's account of spontaneous generation, subordinate forms play a crucial role—a point that is also noted by Sakamoto (116–18). To put it in a nutshell, Scaliger holds that plants can contain organic parts whose substantial forms are under the domination of the substantial form of the plant, but can develop into living beings of their own once the plant begins to decay. Also, he analyzes the idea of a "mixture of forms" as reducing to the idea of a teleological order of forms within composites. Consequently, subordinate forms cannot be understood as being contained in the dominant form. Rather, even while they are teleologically related to the dominant form, subordinate forms retain their existential independence. Thus, it may be a good idea to allow for minor inconsistencies between passages that deal with the same topics in a somewhat diverging way, thereby saving the overall coherence of ideas that are central to Scaliger's thought.

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Miquel Beltràn. *The Influence of Abraham Cohen de Herrera's Kabbalah on Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. vi + 449. Cloth, \$218.00.

Addressing the alleged "great secrets" contained in Scripture, Spinoza wrote in the *Theological Political Treatise* (*TTP*): "I have also read, and for that matter, known personally, certain Kabbalistic triflers. I've never been able to be sufficiently amazed by their madness" (*TTP* chapter 9, Gebhardt III/136/1–2). Were these words Spinoza's only reference to the Kabbalah, we would hardly have any reason to believe that his attitude toward the Kabbalistic literature was anything but dismissive. However, in a 1675 letter to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza stressed that he shared the view that "all things are in God" with certain ancient traditions (*traditionibus*) of the Hebrews, "corrupted as they have been in many ways" (Epistle 73, Gebhardt IV/307/11). Since the very meaning of the word 'Kabbalah' in Hebrew is 'tradition,' and since the view of the Kabbalah as a corpus of ancient wisdom that got corrupted was widespread among early modern writers, it is highly likely that Spinoza's claims in the letter to Oldenburg referred to Kabbalistic pantheism (which was the main current within Kabbalistic thought).

The precise nature of Spinoza's relation to the Kabbalah has been subject to debate and speculation ever since Wachter's 1699 *Spinozismus in Jüdenthumb*; and the list of luminaries who took part in this debate include Leibniz, F. H. Jacobi, Salomon Maimon, Schelling, Gershom Scholem, Zev Harvey, and Moshe Idel. The main common feature that Spinoza's