

Martin Mulsow, ed., *Spätrenaissance-Philosophie in Deutschland, 1570-1650. Entwürfe zwischen Humanismus und Konfessionalisierung, okkulten Traditionen und Schulmetaphysik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009), pp. 404, €139.95, US\$196.00, ISBN 978 3 484 36624 4.

This volume unites a selection of papers from a conference held in November 2000 at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. Nine years is a long time to get a conference volume published, but most of the papers cover little-known figures from late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century German intellectual history, and in most cases there is not much new literature that has appeared in the meantime. So, in spite of the long delay, the volume is perfectly up-to-date and contains much that will be unfamiliar even to specialists. The volume starts with contributions on philosophical responses to Socinianism (Martin Mulsow, Robin Barnes, Maria Rosa Antognazza), followed by a section on Neoplatonic strands in German philosophy of the period (Thomas Leinkauf, Ralph Häfner), and a section on philosophy of religion (Winfried Schröder, Stephan Meier-Oeser). There are also sections on early modern anthropology (Uwe Cordes, Markus Friedrich), ontology (Sven Knebel, Joseph S. Freedman), the academic practices connected with philosophical dissertations (Ulrich G. Leinsle), and the development of Protestant ethics (Horst Dreitzel).

For present purposes, let me focus on three papers that are particularly interesting from a history of science perspective and then add some comments on the concept of “Late Renaissance Philosophy.” In his contribution, Barnes traces the sources and confessional context of an early work of the Wittenberg-based physician Johannes Jessen (1566-1621). In this work, Jessen adopts many elements of the Neoplatonic and hermetic natural philosophy of Francesco Patrizi. As Barnes argues, Jessen gives to these elements a novel function: while Patrizi regards *prisca sapientia* as a universal tool for overcoming confessional controversies, Jessen uses *prisca sapientia* as a tool for defending Lutheran orthodoxy. Barnes suggests that Jessen’s usage of ternary distinctions in the natural world and his emphasis on the analogy between such ternary distinctions and the structure of the Trinity should be read as a philosophical defense of the dogma of the Trinity against anti-Trinitarian currents—a suggestion that is consistent with Jessen’s own claim that the *prisca sapientia* is strongly supportive of Lutheranism.

Meier-Oeser outlines the intellectual biography of Henricus Nollius (ca. 1583-1626), who started as an author of conventional textbooks in Aristotelian metaphysics, then took a medical doctorate, and continued his literary career as a proponent of Paracelsian natural philosophy. As Meier-Oeser points out, what is striking about Nollius’s development is that he continued publishing revised versions of his works on Aristotelian metaphysics. How did Nollius conceive of the relation between his two fields of activity? Meier-Oeser presents some interesting evidence that, contrary to what almost everyone else thought at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Nollius regarded Aristotelian metaphysics and Paracelsian natural philosophy not only

as compatible but as complementary, the Aristotelian strand providing a general theory of ontological categories, the Paracelsian strand providing an account of the nature of material and spiritual particulars.

Leinsle examines a group of philosophical dissertations from the Jesuit University of Dillingen. These dissertations provide some micro-historical insight into the reception of the natural philosophies of Girolamo Cardano and Julius Caesar Scaliger. Leinsle analyses how the practices of partial censorship suppressed certain aspects of Cardano's work and how some of Scaliger's objections to Cardano were strategically applied to refute other aspects of Cardano's thought that were not officially subject to censorship. In particular, Leinsle shows that Scaliger's natural philosophy was by no means taken over as whole; rather, many of Scaliger's views were used quite independently from their theoretical context. The entire purpose of this usage of Scaliger, as Leinsle argues, seems to have been to prevent the reception of aspects of Cardano's thought—such as his views on *magia naturalis*—that were regarded as offensive from a theological point of view.

Like the other contributions in this volume, these three papers contain much that will be stimulating for future controversies about how to characterize German philosophy between the Reformation and the end of the Thirty Years War. One such controversy could focus on the concept of "Late Renaissance Philosophy" proposed by Mulsow. As Mulsow characterizes the concept, it contains two main components: (1) The view that German philosophy of the period could be characterized as a "cultural transfer"—the adaptation of a range of ancient philosophies as reinterpreted by major Renaissance philosophers; and (2) the view that the purpose of such a "cultural transfer" was a response to certain theological challenges arising in the process of confessionalization. No doubt, this fits well with the contributions by Barnes, Leinsle, and Mulsow. Yet, is the notion of "cultural transfer" adequate to characterize more generally the usage of ancient and Renaissance thought in German philosophy of the period? Here a consideration of some of the major figures of the period, who are not discussed in detail in the present volume, could lead to a more nuanced picture. Take, for example, Rudolph Goclenius (1547-1628). To be sure, Antognazza mentions that Goclenius's *Lexicon philosophicum Graecum* was an important source of information about neoplatonic concepts. Nevertheless, in his own work, most notably in his *Conciliator philosophicus*, Goclenius took a more eclectic and conciliatory stance towards positions from ancient and Renaissance philosophy. Goclenius's methodology involves not only selecting and recombining components from various philosophical traditions, but often also reinterpreting these components so as to render them compatible. Using such a methodology pursues not just the aim of using traditional material to settle a given theological controversy; rather, it pursues the aim of using traditional material in order to find a novel philosophical synthesis. German philosophy of the period between 1570 and 1650, it would seem, should not only be characterized as a last revival of Renaissance thought for confessional purposes; it should also be characterized as a field in which the eclectic and conciliatory methodologies that became influential

later in the seventeenth century in the work of philosophers such as Jakob Thomasius, Erhard Weigel, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, first took shape.

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