

Thomas Williams, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xvi, 408.

Apart from Thomas Aquinas and William Ockham, John Duns Scotus is the best-known philosopher and theologian of the High Middle Ages. It seems appropriate, therefore, that after the appearance of a *Companion* devoted to each of previous figures, there should appear a *Companion to Duns Scotus*. Indeed, it seems all the more appropriate since, until now, the English-speaking world had yet to produce anything like a systematic introduction to Scotus's intellectual achievement.

Like the other volumes in the *Companion* series, this one is intended to serve as a reference work for students and non-specialists, to provide "the most convenient and accessible guide to Scotus currently available" (i). Although the book is by no means easy-going at all points (which would in any case be unreasonable to expect from a guide devoted to the "Subtle Doctor"), it will certainly serve its intended purpose. The volume contains twelve chapters, which can be divided into five parts, roughly corresponding to five areas of contemporary philosophical concern:

- I. Metaphysics (chaps. 1-3)
- II. Logic and Language (chaps. 4-5)
- III. Philosophical Theology (chaps. 6-7)
- IV. Mind and Cognition (chaps. 8-9)
- V. Ethics (chaps. 10-12).

In addition to the main chapters, there is a brief introduction, a list of works in English translation, and the usual front and back matter, including a list of citations of works attributed to

Scotus, which will help its readers to correlate references in the text to newly appearing volumes of the critical editions of Scotus.

This *Companion* is both well organized and well conceived. As already noted, some chapters are difficult, but the volume as a whole has been organized so as to maximize the usefulness of difficult chapters for specialists and non-specialists alike: earlier parts of the volume lay the foundation for later ones, and individual chapters within each part build on and complement one another. For example, Part I—devoted to Metaphysics—begins (chap. 1, Peter King) with a general introduction to Scotus’s metaphysics, and then addresses more specific and difficult aspects of his metaphysical views: space and time (chap. 2, Neil Lewis), and universals and individuation (chap. 3, Timothy Noone).

Again, Parts II and III—devoted to Logic and Language, and Philosophical Theology respectively—pick up and develop many of the metaphysical themes raised in Part I. Indeed, because Scotus’s views about logic, language, and theology are so closely connected to his views in metaphysics, it is useful that the chapters addressing them—namely, modal theory (chap. 4, Calvin Normore), philosophy of language (chap. 5, Dominik Perler), natural theology (chap. 6, James Ross and Todd Bates), and knowledge of God, (chap. 7, William Mann)—follow immediately on those dealing with his metaphysics.

Parts IV and V, which treat Scotus’s views about issues related to human nature and action, also build on and develop themes discussed in earlier chapters. Part IV—devoted to Mind and Cognition—brings us from the discussion in Part III of our knowledge of God to Scotus’s views about knowledge in general. This part begins (in chap. 8, Richard Cross) with a broad overview of Scotus’s philosophy of mind, including his views about the powers of the soul, and then turns (in chap. 9, Robert Pasnau) to a more in-depth treatment of the cognitive

powers in particular. Part V—devoted to Ethics, conceived broadly enough to include Action Theory and Moral Psychology—contains three chapters, one on Scotus’s theory of natural law (chap. 10, Hannes Möhle), one on his metaethics and action theory (chap. 11, Thomas Williams), and one on his views about the place of virtues in the moral life (chap. 12, Bonnie Kent). This last part provides a fitting conclusion to the volume by surveying the metaphysical, epistemological, and theological bases of Scotus’s moral thinking

Because it would be impossible, in a review of this sort, to discuss each of the chapters individually, in what follows I will focus instead on the strengths and weaknesses of the volume’s five main parts, with a view to providing an assessment of the volume as a whole.

Parts I-II: Metaphysics, Logic, and Language. With the possible exception of Bonnie Kent’s chapter on the virtues (which situates Scotus’s views relative to current ethical debates), the first two parts of the volume are likely to be of most interest to contemporary (analytic) philosophers. These parts focus on issues at the heart of contemporary philosophical concern, as well as on the parts of Scotus’s work that has received the most attention in recent years.

While each of the chapters comprising Parts I-II are of high quality, King’s introduction to Scotus’s metaphysics is, by itself, worth the price of the volume. In addition to explaining Scotus’s views about the nature of metaphysics as a discipline, this chapter ranges informatively over a number of his most distinctive metaphysical views, including sameness and difference, the nature and extent of the categories, causality, form, matter, and composite substance. Especially noteworthy are (a) King’s discussion of the formal and modal distinctions (21-26), which cuts a clear path through some extremely difficult material in Scotus and the secondary

literature, and (b) his discussion of relations (in particular, the so-called third mode relations) (33-38), which sheds light on a pervasive, though technical, feature of Scotus's views.

The chapters by Lewis (space and time), Normore (modality), and Perler (language) are also informative, and work hard at explaining, wherever possible, how Scotus's views relate to contemporary views on the same topics, at points remarking insightfully on why this project of comparison is often so difficult. Perler's chapter is of special note in this connection, since so little work has been done on Scotus's philosophy of language. Noone's chapter on universals and individuation is a piece of first-rate scholarship. Regrettably, however, Noone does little to show how Scotus's views on these topics—which are among his most enduring legacy—relate to contemporary debates.

Parts III-IV: Philosophical Theology, Mind, and Cognition. Like the chapters on metaphysics, logic, and language, those comprising Parts III-IV are also of uniformly high quality, and contain important philosophical and historical insights. For example, Mann's suggestion (247-248) that multiple realizability is what underwrites Scotus's views about univocity is provocative, and Pasnau's discussion of intuitive cognition and illumination (296-304) helpfully places Scotus within the context of the medieval debates to which he was contributing.

In these same parts, however, we encounter some significant repetition. Both of the chapters on philosophical theology, for example, touch on Scotus's views about univocity (first discussed in King's introduction), and in Ross and Bates's chapter we encounter the proof for God's existence for the third time (first touched on in King's chapter, and then again in Normore's). Again, while the chapter by Cross is excellent if taken by itself, in the context of

the volume as a whole it covers much the same territory as that covered in the chapters by King and Pasnau.

It must also be said that Parts III-IV contain some notable omissions. Given the importance of Scotus's views about the will, for example, it is somewhat surprising that there is a whole chapter on Scotus's views about the cognitive powers, but no corresponding chapter on his views about the appetitive powers (or the rational appetite and will in particular). To be fair, Scotus's views about the will are discussed at other points in the volume (most notably, in chap. 11). But in each case their treatment is subordinated to that of other issues, which detracts from their genuine originality and intrinsic interest—and, in any case, is not what one might expect given the structure of the volume.

Again, given the influence of Scotus on subsequent developments in theology, in both Catholic and Protestant circles, as well as the broadening of issues taken up in contemporary philosophy of religion, one might have expected a chapter devoted to Scotus's distinctively philosophical contributions to so-called "revealed" theology (in addition to those addressing his contributions to "natural" theology).¹

Part V: Ethics. The three chapters comprising the final part of the volume address issues that have been of a topic of scholarly interest for some time. In addition to advancing aspects of Scotistic debate, perhaps their chief merit lies in the fact that they, more than the chapters comprising any other part, attempt to locate Scotus's views in relation to those of his predecessors and contemporaries, with the result that they give us the best sense of Scotus's significance for the history of philosophy. Thus, Möhle's chapter compares Scotus's theory of

¹ This omission can be compensated for, however, by supplementing the current volume with Richard Cross's recent introduction to Scotus's theology, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

natural law with that of Aquinas, arguing that despite the voluntaristic elements of Scotus's theory there is a significant place for reason in ethics. Williams's chapter shows how Scotus's distinctive views in moral psychology and action theory can be thought of as deriving from certain anti-Aristotelian (and hence anti-Thomistic) elements of his metaethics. And Kent's chapter argues that Scotus's move away from virtue-centered ethical thinking is not only appealing, but distinguishes his views from those of both Aristotelians (such as Aquinas) and Platonists (such as Augustine). As I suggested earlier, Kent's chapter is likely to be of particular interest to contemporary moral philosophers, especially those interested in the viability of broadly eudaimonistic ethical theory.

On the whole, this *Companion* succeeds admirably in giving us a systematic introduction to the main areas of Scotus's thought. Not all the parts of the volume are as successful as the fifth in placing Scotus's thought in context, and there is less general reflection in the volume on Scotus's place in history than there might have been. (There is, for example, no concluding chapter on the legacy of Scotus, nor any introductory chapter designed to locate Scotus's life and works in their late-medieval intellectual milieu.) But even so, by virtue of its comprehensiveness and the quality of its contributions, it fills a major lacuna in the secondary literature; it will, no doubt, remain *the* standard reference on Scotus for some time to come. Finally, because of the analytical rigor and historical care with which its authors approach their subject, the volume is also successful at displaying the value of reflecting from a contemporary point of view on the best medieval thought.

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