



Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy

Essays in Honor of Vere Chappell

*Edited by Paul Hoffman,
David Owen, and Gideon Yaffe*



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Introduction

The essays in this collection are all studies in the history of modern philosophy. Together they provide a cross-section of current efforts to reconstruct and engage with the views of the major figures of the early modern period.

The essays engage a wide variety of issues of central interest to philosophers of the early modern period and of pressing importance today. Some engage with early modern efforts to understand basic metaphysical structures and relations such as substance, essence, identity and causation. Others examine early modern philosophy of mind and philosophy of perception. And some are concerned with early modern conceptions of natural mechanisms, of the place of free human acts and volitions within a mechanistic world, and with early modern efforts to understand ethical evaluation in the context of the mechanistic worldview.

All of the essays published here honor our friend and mentor Vere Chappell. The essays reflect an approach to the history of philosophy of which Chappell's work is exemplary. They take for granted that we still have much to learn from the philosophers of the early modern period and that their views are as at least as important and sophisticated as those of contemporary philosophers. They are sympathetic, yet critical without being ideological. They are closely grounded in the text and sensitive to alternative readings of the text.

SUMMARIES OF THE ESSAYS

Gareth Matthews challenges the claim of Stephen Menn that Descartes's reasoning in the Fourth Meditation faithfully tracks Augustine's in *On Free Choice of the Will*. Matthews claims first that Descartes assumed, contrary to Augustine, that the mere existence of evil is compatible with God's infinite goodness and power, and second that Descartes's project was to determine the limits on the sort of errors God will permit us to make. He argues that it is not quite right to view Augustine as offering the free-will defense as the solution to the problem





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of evil, because Evodius raises the further question of why God could not give us free will in such a way that we could never have used it to produce evil. Matthews argues that Augustine never directly answered this question in *On Free Choice of the Will*, and indeed, later, in *The City of God*, allowed that God could give creatures free will without its being possible for them to sin. In contrast to Augustine in *On Free Choice of the Will*, Descartes, according to Matthews, did try to explain why God did not create us with free will in such a way that we always avoid error. Furthermore, Descartes, unlike Augustine, was not committed to the claim that we cannot act rightly unless we are capable of sinning, nor was Descartes committed to the view that we are incapable of avoiding error in this life.

Lisa Shapiro proposes a way to reconcile Descartes's commitment to two apparently incompatible conceptions of freedom of will: freedom of spontaneity, according to which our will is determined by its nature to affirm the true and pursue the good, and freedom of indifference, according to which it is always in our power to do otherwise. Her view is that Descartes thought we can exercise freedom of indifference only when we have an insufficient knowledge of our nature. Once we achieve knowledge of our nature, a knowledge which we acquire through experience of acting contrary to our nature, we resolve to pursue our nature—that is, we resolve to affirm the true and pursue the good. Our being determined to pursue the good and the true thus involves a resolution to pursue our nature.

Marleen Rozemond defends what she terms a moderate Platonist interpretation of Descartes's conception of true and immutable natures. According to her view, true and immutable natures are objective beings in God's mind in virtue of being the content of divine decrees. Objective being, she explains, is the form of being that objects of thought have in the mind, a form of being that is inferior to the real existence of objects outside the mind. She argues that these objective beings are only distinct by reason from God, which she interprets to mean that they are not distinguished in God but only in our thought. She responds to the objection that since God is the efficient cause of true and immutable natures, they must be external to God, by countering that since Descartes thought a mind can be the efficient cause of objective beings in its thoughts, God could also cause objective beings in his own mind.

Thomas Lennon calls to our attention a neglected objection against Descartes that Descartes himself referred to as the "objection of objections", namely, that all the things we can conceive are only fictions of our mind. Lennon argues that this objection should be attributed to Gassendi, and that Descartes responded to the objection by drawing on the claim that a real idea, one that is not "materially false", must represent a possible existent. Lennon argues that, according to Descartes, the objection of objections cannot even be stated except by employing real ideas of the sort that its conclusion denies to be possible. This response to the objection of objections, Lennon suggests, also provides Descartes with a response to Gassendi's objection to the ontological argument for God's existence.





Alison Simmons calls our attention to the puzzling view held by Descartes and Malebranche that it is in virtue of grossly misrepresenting the world by projecting our sensations onto it that our senses are capable of playing a crucial role in keeping the embodied human mind alive. In resolving this puzzle she explains why Descartes and Malebranche thought that sensations are better guides than the clear and distinct ideas of the intellect to what is beneficial or harmful to the composite of mind and body. She notes various features of sensations, missing in intellectual ideas, that enable them to fulfill this task. Our intellectual ideas fail to single out any particular body as ours; they fail to pick out any particular bodies in the causal chain that results in our sensations as more salient than others; they are not sufficiently affective to draw our attention to what is necessary to preserve our lives; they fail to represent bodies as beneficial or harmful to the composite; and they fail to motivate an attachment to our own body as our own.

John Carriero argues that if we understand monads to be fundamentally seats of agency rather than seats of cognition we can reach a better understanding of why Leibniz thought that the physical world needs to be grounded in a more fundamental, metaphysical order of monads. With the emergence of mechanistic science, Aristotelian natural ends disappeared from the physical world. Leibniz was persuaded that physical laws cannot be explained purely geometrically, but instead require force and activity, and, agreeing with the Aristotelians that activity requires actors with ends, he located these actors in a metaphysical order. Carriero argues further that Leibniz did not see end-governed activity as requiring consciousness or self-consciousness, rather it requires that the end be registered in the current structure of the agent and that there be a subsequent natural inclination to the end. Finally, Carriero maintains that we get a better account of the unity of monads if we think of them as unified by end-governed activity rather than by the unity of consciousness, which points to an important similarity between monads and Aristotelian substantial forms.

G.A.J. Rogers examines the development of some central elements of Locke's *Essay*. He argues that in the course of writing a series of lectures on the moral law in the 1660's, *Essays on the Law of Nature*, Locke gave up the view that there are some moral principles that are universally accepted, a view that at the time he thought implied innate knowledge, and embraced empiricism. He notes further that what appears to be an entry by Locke in a notebook belonging to his father suggests that at a young age Locke adopted the view, contrary to his curriculum at Oxford, that metaphysics has no place in philosophy. In addition, he makes the case that Locke's keen interest in philosophy emerged from reading Descartes sometime in 1659 or 1660.

Nicholas Jolley sets out to show that Locke's theory of abstract ideas is intended, among other roles it plays, to provide a systematic replacement for Descartes's theory of innate ideas in spite of certain notable exceptions. Among the most important ideas Descartes considered to be innate are the ideas of eternal truths.





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Jolley maintains that Locke shared with Descartes the view that eternal truths, for example, the truths of mathematics, have no existence outside our thought, but rejected the view that the eternity of such truths can be accounted for by our having innate ideas of them. He argues that Locke can explain the eternity of eternal truths by appealing to the fact that abstract ideas can enter into eternal and immutable relations in virtue of their objective reality or representative content. Jolley grants that two metaphysical ideas that Descartes considered to be innate—the idea of God and the idea of identity—Locke did not consider to be abstract, but he argues that Locke's idea of substance is a complex idea that contains an element that is abstract and an element that is relational. Finally he argues that his thesis that abstract ideas systematically replace innate ideas is not undermined by the fact that Locke held that animals differ from humans in lacking abstract ideas, whereas Descartes did not hold the corresponding thesis that animals differ from humans in lacking innate ideas, but rather in having no ideas at all. The reason the thesis is not undermined is that Descartes was committed to the view that animals are incapable of having any ideas because they lack innate ideas.

Ed McCann explores the question of whether Locke's argument for the conclusion that there is nothing essential to him commits him to a version of the relative identity theory according to which x and y can be the same F without being the same G , even though both x and y are G 's. McCann agrees that Locke was not a relative identity theorist, but he rejects the attribution to Locke of the view that a living body and the mass of matter out of which it is composed are distinct entities. Instead McCann argues that Locke's exclusion principle—that it is not possible that two things of the same kind should exist in the same place at the same time—and his principle that one thing cannot have two beginnings of existence nor two things one beginning of existence pertain only to the three basic kinds of substances: God, finite spirits, and bodies. He argues further that Locke was not concerned with settling synchronic identity questions of material composition. Instead he was concerned to show that the two fundamentally different kinds of continuity he recognizes—spatiotemporal continuity and the continuity of an organism—can be accounted for without appeal to substantial forms. Spatiotemporal continuity is an entirely natural relation; whereas the continuity of an organism is partly dependent on our ideas.

Dan Kaufman makes the case that Locke's account of the ontological status of organisms is inconsistent. Despite passages in the *Essay* in which Locke seems unequivocally to commit himself to the view that organisms are substances, there are passages in the *Essay* and elsewhere in which he commits himself to the contrary view. Kaufman focuses on his reply to Stillingfleet concerning the resurrection of the body. Stillingfleet maintained that the Christian doctrine of resurrection requires that the same body be resurrected; Locke argued that it did not. Kaufman notes that what is curious in this dispute is that since Stillingfleet agreed that the same mass of particles constituting the body at the time





of death need not constitute the body that is resurrected, the dispute between them should have focused on whether the same living organism is resurrected. But instead of replying to Stillingfleet that the body that is resurrected is not the same living organism because its existence is not continuous, Locke instead only concerned himself with the mass of particles, strongly suggesting that he did not consider the living organism to be a body. But if he did not consider the living organism to be a body, that in turn provides evidence that he did not think the living organism is a substance.

Michael Jacovides examines Locke's account of fluids, which include what we now call gases and liquids. According to Locke, fluids are composed of freely moving corpuscles that may or may not touch one another. Some of the corpuscles in a fluid touch, but there can also be gaps between them. Jacovides maintains that Locke thought fluids may endure even though divided. He argues in addition that Locke thought fluids considered as wholes and their constituent particles are solid because they fill space, exclude other matter from being in the same place at the same time, and prevent corpuscles from passing through without pushing other corpuscles aside. Fluids considered as wholes are soft because they easily change their shape, but their constituent corpuscles are absolutely hard. This absolute hardness of corpuscles as a foundational cause, Jacovides argues, is consistent with their elasticity functioning as an intermediate cause.

Kenneth Winkler argues that 'natural history' was not Locke's only model of scientific achievement, and that he was concerned to find a place for mathematical physics. Locke asserted, in his final reply to Stillingfleet, that Newton provided a demonstration that Descartes's theory of the planets being carried along by vortices is mistaken. What exactly Locke thought Newton had demonstrated is open to question. Winkler argues that it would have been sufficient to rebut Stillingfleet had Newton succeeded in demonstrating a conditional statement whose consequent is that the planets are not carried along by vortices and whose antecedent makes reference to various mathematical principles, laws of nature, and astronomical phenomena. He argues further that Locke could not grant that the non-conditional statement that the planets are carried along by vortices can be demonstrated, because he thought the law of gravitational attraction cannot be known intuitively or demonstratively. Winkler further speculates that changes in the fourth edition of the *Essay* indicate that Locke thought Newton had succeeded in improving our knowledge of body by first, making our idea of body more complete by discovering that bodies obey the law of gravitation, and second, by discovering intermediate ideas that enable us to show the agreement between various properties of bodies.

Martha Bolton explains how Locke can account for our obligation to obey the moral law. Locke agreed that we are obligated to obey the law only if we have or ought to have knowledge of it, but his empiricism prevented him from agreeing with other natural law theorists who maintained that we have innate knowledge





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of the moral law. He also disagreed with Pufendorf who maintained that we can acquire knowledge of our moral obligations by absorbing our social training. Locke thought moral understanding comes from questioning social practices. He maintained that we have an epistemic duty to inquire about the existence of the divine law, but this duty, Bolton argues, cannot itself be a moral duty. This epistemic duty of inquiry arises from the demand to use our cognitive powers as God designed them, and Locke thought we naturally understand the propriety of truth-conducive habits of mind.

Margaret Atherton makes the case that Berkeley's neglected 1733 *Theory of Vision Vindicated* sheds light on his more familiar 1709 *New Theory of Vision*. The second part of the *Theory of Vision Vindicated* presents the same material as found in the *New Theory of Vision* but in a different order. In the *New Theory of Vision* the material is presented according to the order of discovery, or analysis, with the conclusion being that vision is the language of the author of nature. In *Theory of Vision Vindicated* the material is presented synthetically, taking the conclusion of the analytic method as a principle to deduce theorems and explanations of phenomena. Atherton argues that reflection on the structure of *The Theory of Vision Vindicated* helps establish that Berkeley was committed to the view suggested by some passages in the *New Theory of Vision*, and contradicted by others, that color and light are the only objects of vision and that visible extension and situation are products of a constructive process.

Janet Broughton maintains that in arguing that reason does not play a role in basic causal inferences, Hume was not advocating the skeptical conclusion that our causal inferences are utterly unjustified. Although these inferences are justified not in a way that yields certainty, nor are they justified by appeal to the Uniformity Principle "that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same," it does not follow that they do not yield knowledge. On the contrary, Hume thought that our basic causal inferences resulting from custom and habit are sources of knowledge. Broughton argues further that Hume had a general account explaining the occurrence of perceptions that agrees with his account of these basic causal inferences; however she also points out that the general account does not seem to agree with his account of other phenomena such as our belief in the continued existence of bodies distinct from the mind.

Stephen Voss argues for a historical and a philosophical thesis regarding Kant's view that sensibility is non-conceptual. The historical thesis is that in his 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation* Kant maintained that sensibility provides cognitions that are conceptual and that it is only later that Kant comes to view sensibility as non-conceptual. The philosophical thesis is that Kant's view has been a disaster. As an alternative to the Kantian view that sensations give us objects non-conceptually, Voss provides a causal account of how sense impressions can be related to single





objects and still be conceptual. Voss further examines the views of prominent 20th century defenders of non-conceptual sensibility—those of Bertrand Russell, Wilfrid Sellars, Jaegwon Kim and Gareth Evans—and argues that each has a fatal flaw.

Paul Guyer notes that while Kant presented Hume's doubts concerning causation as concerning the concept of causation, Hume also raised doubts about our fundamental belief about causation, namely, that associations between events will continue to hold in the future. Nor was Kant aware that Hume also raised doubts about our concepts of and beliefs about external objects and the self. Nevertheless, Kant's answers to Hume's worries about external objects and the self are parallel to his answers to Hume regarding causation. These answers, Guyer maintains, are ultimately part of a single integrated account of the possibility of a kind of self-knowledge that Hume took for granted. According to Guyer, Kant provided a two-fold response to Hume's twofold doubts. First, Kant appealed to the resources of general logic and the pure forms of intuition to explain the a priori origin of the concepts of causation, substance, and self that Hume could not derive from sensory impressions. Second, in his analysis of the possibility of our empirical knowledge of determinate changes in the sequence of our perceptions, Kant argued that this knowledge presupposes beliefs about causation, external objects, and the self that Hume doubted.

