

Russell L. Friedman and Lauge O. Nielsen, eds. *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400–1700*.

The New Synthese Historical Library 53. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003. vi + 346 pp. index. bibl. \$155. ISBN: 1–4020–1631–X.

This collected volume, which already appeared in 2003 but only recently found its way to this reviewer's desk, sets out to contribute to the pulling down of the barriers between medieval and early modern philosophy. Since at least the days of Etienne Gilson's study of the scholastic background of Descartes, historians have learnt to be suspicious of the grand claims of originality and innovation with which Renaissance humanists and early modern thinkers presented their ideas and professed their independency from the "perfidious lot" of the scholastics. Of course, there is a lot of innovation during these periods, but innovation can only be measured against the background of shared assumptions and common paradigms, and it has become clear that this shared background and continuity are as important as the breaks and discontinuities. The programmatic setting of this volume can therefore hardly be called revolutionary, but its focus on modalities and modal logic is well-chosen. In metaphysics and theology the notions of possibility and impossibility, contingency and necessity, are vitally important, and it is one of the great values of this volume to bring together some fine studies on the scholastic legacy in these and related areas.

The volume originated within different frameworks: the majority of the papers are the fruit of a collaborative project on metaphysics and philosophical theology in the transition period. A smaller group of articles originated in a conference on the history of modal theory and modal logic. Given the obvious limits of the genre, this collected volume succeeds well in its message that we should treat the period 1400–1700 as a whole without a sharp break between the later Middle Ages, on the one hand, and the Renaissance and early modern period, on the other. There are articles on the scope and object of

metaphysics (Ludger Honnefelder, Joël Biard), on the scope and validity of the laws of logic (Simo Knuuttila), on the origins of logical possibility (Jeffrey Coombs) and “moral modalities” (Sven Knebel) and on modal logic in fifteenth-century Germany (Gino Roncaglia — a particularly clear article). There is a technical article on the scholastic background of Leibniz’s notion of compossibility (Fabrizio Montadori), an interesting comparison between Ockham’s mental language and Locke’s “way of ideas” (Claude Panaccio), and a discussion of the debates on free will and divine foreknowledge (Chris Schabel). Russell Friedman discusses the nominalist background of Gabriel Biel’s treatment of the Trinity, and briefly compares it with Luther’s. The reappropriation of Aristotelian philosophy in Protestant theology is the subject of Sachiko Kusukawa’s contribution. The institutional setting of late medieval philosophy is treated by Maarten Hoenen, who examines the *Wegestreit* between Albertists, Thomists, and the *via moderna* of the nominalists.

It is thus a volume essentially devoted to the scholastic traditions, and how they continued to renew themselves and made their impact on early modern thought. It is not concerned with humanism, and this is not surprising. Metaphysics and logic were the very disciplines which humanists sought to discredit, and when some humanists such as Salutati, Valla, and Pomponazzi did say something on such themes — such as divine foreknowledge and human free will — the verdict is not positive: “nothing new under the sun” writes Chris Schabel on Pomponazzi (180). Nor does the volume deal with Renaissance thinkers such as Ficino, Campanella, Telesio, Patrizi, or Ramus, who had a lot to say — both positive and negative — about metaphysical and logical themes. But one cannot pull down all barriers all at once.

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