

Descartes and the First Cartesians. Roger Ariew.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xix + 236 pp. \$74.

Roger Ariew best expresses his book's purpose in the opening lines of his introduction: "*Descartes and the First Cartesians* adopts the perspective that we should not approach Descartes as a solitary, virtually autistic thinker, but as a philosopher who constructs a dialogue with his contemporaries, so as to engage them and various elements of his society in his philosophical enterprise" (ix). The author's disapprobation of approaching Descartes's work as though it were conceived in isolation may seem so obvious as to not be worth mentioning. However, placing Descartes's work in its context is a relatively new phenomenon in anglophone scholarship. Indeed, even the attempts to contextualize Descartes's works by noted early twentieth-century French scholars, such as Etienne Gilson, were one-dimensional in their naïve equivalence of Scholastic Aristotelian philosophy with Thomism.

In this work, through an examination of the textbook tradition, Ariew makes great strides toward righting this wrong by providing an insightful study of the place of Descartes's philosophy within its vastly rich and eclectic seventeenth-century intellectual milieu. This is an intriguing approach motivated by Descartes's desire to publish his own textbook, *The Principles of Philosophy*, alongside the widely used *Summa Philosophiae Quadripartita* by Eustachius of Saint Paul. Descartes picked this textbook because he saw it as being the best of its kind. He planned to publish each article of his *Principles* next to the corresponding articles from Eustachius — providing clear support for Ariew's claim that Descartes desired an active engagement with the intellectual establishment of his day.

The first part of Ariew's book provides a general survey of how philosophy was taught during the period, an overview of the tension between Thomist and Scotist brands of Scholasticism, and Descartes's own relationship with the Jesuit, Oratorian, and

Doctrinaire traditions. The second part uses Eustachius's *Summa* to explain the general format of the Scholastic textbook. He begins with the observation that the practice of composing commentaries on Aristotle's works had largely ceased. Liberated textbook authors, such as Eustachius, thus arranged subjects around various questions concerning logic, ethics, physics, and metaphysics. Ariew goes into some detail about how each of these sections was internally organized, compares Eustachius's *Summa* to other textbooks of the time (e.g., those of Dupliex and Goudin), and provides concise glimpses into how some of these authors tried to resolve those questions.

The third section returns to a discussion of Descartes's proposed textbook with particular focus on the metaphor of the tree of philosophy found in the preface to the French translation of *The Principles of Philosophy*. The image is that the tree's roots are metaphysics, the trunk physics, and all the sciences, namely medicine, mechanics, and morals, are the branches. Hence, Descartes rearranges the traditional Scholastic order of these categories. Ariew continues to compare the structure of Descartes's textbook with those of his Scholastic counterparts along with further brief looks at some of Descartes's responses to commonly discussed philosophical questions. The fourth section moves beyond Descartes himself to the textbooks of his successors and to the difficulties some of them had with composing a Cartesian textbook in the quad-partite structure of the Scholastics. For example, Descartes famously found syllogistic logic unsatisfactory as a method of inquiry but preferred to develop his own method. Accordingly, most Cartesian textbooks focused on explanations and analyses of Descartes's four rules as found in his *Discourse on Method* instead of on aspects of Aristotle's *Organon*, as was the practice among their Scholastic counterparts. They also tended to follow the order of the tree of philosophy with logic (method) as a preliminary, and then the roots of metaphysics, the trunk of physics, and then the branch of ethics. Once again, Ariew provides brief looks into the Cartesian responses to some typical philosophical questions and their internal disputes.

In the end, Ariew cracks open the door in the wardrobe to a hitherto largely overlooked philosophical world with which Descartes and his followers were intensely engaged and were zealously striving to transform. The book is an inspiring primer for graduate students and professional scholars alike to step off the well-trodden path and into an as yet mostly unexplored realm.

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