SIMONE VAN RIET, JULES JANSSENS and ANDRÉ ALLARD (eds.), **Avicenna Latinus, Liber primus naturalium, tractatus secundus: De motu et de consimilibus.** Introduction by Gérard Verbeke. Leuven: Peeters, 2006. Pp. lxxxix + 373. ISBN 978-2-8031-0231-0. £173.70 (hardback).
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Avicenna's *Physics* was the most significant treatment of the science of physics in the medieval Islamic world. Unlike virtually all other works on nature within the Arabic-speaking philosophical tradition, Avicenna's account was not simply a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, but a thorough, independent reconfirmation, reworking and at times renunciation of Aristotle. At its very core is the book under review, Book II, *De motu et de consimilibus*, in which Avicenna discussed motion, place/void and time. Here Avicenna articulated his influential theory of motion at an instant and the related notion of a limit; he additionally addressed the great classical problem of the placement of the outermost celestial sphere. Yet despite this work's importance for the history of medieval physics, in both East and West, the *Avicenna Latinus* editions are the only translations of whole books from Avicenna's *Physics* into a 'European' language. While the fact that this book is a critical edition of a medieval Latin text makes it self-selecting for specialists of medieval science, the French introduction describing the Aristotelian Greek commentary tradition surrounding the *Physics* will undoubtedly be of interest to students of ancient science and physics more generally. Furthermore, the edition's indices and copious notes, which shed light on Avicenna's original Arabic and place much of his thought in its proper context (both historically and within Avicenna's system itself), make this work an essential reference for students of Arabic science and natural philosophy, regardless of whether they have interests in the Latin Avicenna.

The introduction, which comprises a little less than seventy pages, was written by Gérard Verbeke, who has a talent for accurately presenting technical material in a very accessible and readable style. Here, starting with Aristotle and going through his Greek Neoplatonic commentators, Verbeke provides the historical background to the central topics of Book II. Verbeke's general approach is to show the fidelity of Avicenna to Aristotle in the light of innovations made by later Greek Neoplatonists. While I have no issue with Verbeke's presentation of the Greek developments in the commentary tradition of the *Physics*, which again I think is quite impressive, a few things seem odd about his piece as an introduction to the thought of Avicenna. I shall mention three. First, much more could have been made of Avicenna's aim to verify at least some of Aristotle's positions independently, in ways that frequently involved going well beyond Aristotle and the tradition. To provide a single example, in Book IV of Aristotle's *Physics* an impressive case against the existence of time is presented, which immediately is followed by a discussion of time's relation to motion. The fact that Aristotle provided no explicit proof for the existence of time has been something of an embarrassment for Aristotelian commentators, ancient and modern alike. In contrast, Avicenna offers his own unique proof for the existence of time in terms of possibility – a proof, one might add, that not only accounts for the existence of time, but also underlies one of Avicenna's own arguments for the eternity of the world, which he would present in Book III.11. Despite the importance of this proof Verbeke does not even mention it. Second, Verbeke is keen on presenting the thought of Aristotle and later Neoplatonists and then indicating how Avicenna used these various Greek theories. While Avicenna obviously knew the thought of many of the figures referenced in the introduction, the works of others mentioned by Verbeke, such as Damascius and Simplicius, and Plotinus' *Ennead* III, were not available in Arabic translation, and so Avicenna could not have known them directly. Third, and related to this second point, there is no mention of earlier Arabic sources that may have influenced Avicenna's thought positively or negatively. Here one need think only of Abü Bakr ar-Räzï's theory of time as a substance; for almost certainly he was the source of Avicenna's understanding of this theory, and not Damascius as Verbeke suggests. More generally, there is less about Avicenna and

more about Aristotle and the Greek commentary tradition than one might expect in an introduction to the thought of Avicenna.

Most of this volume, some 220 pages, is the Latin edition of *De motu et de consimilibus*, and like other works in the *Avicenna Latinus* series it is expertly handled. The edition is all the more impressive given some of the difficulties that the editors had to surmount – what Jules Janssens refers to as a '*tâche délicate*.' 'Damn difficult' seems more fitting. One problem is that both of the Arabic editions of Avicenna's *Physics* (neither of which is truly a critical edition) have serious shortcomings. For example, Äl Yäsïn's edition has so many (inadvertent) omissions that it is virtually useless unless read along with the Cairo edition, which itself is replete with typographical errors. What is more, the punctuation and partitioning of the Cairo edition at times defies understanding – for example, a single, albeit complex, sentence in the Cairo edition is broken up into three different paragraphs! The present volume, by contrast, lives up to the highest standards of critical editing. Moreover, the editors have parsed the text into sentences and paragraphs that, for the most part, divide up the arguments at their natural joints. As a consequence even those working with the Arabic text will find the *Avicenna Latinus* useful in following the argument. Finally, the editors have collected as an index ('Annexe II') a list of corrections to the Cairo edition, again making the present volume an indispensable tool for those doing research on medieval Arabic physics.

In sum, this volume is an excellent critical edition of arguably the central text in Avicenna's *Physics*. It is essential reading not only for students of medieval Latin physics, but also for those working primarily within the Arabic tradition. And while I can understand why this volume might not appear on the shelves of everyone's home library, no serious research library should be without it.

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Stephen Clucas (ed.), **John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought.** International Archives of the History of Ideas, 193. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006. Pp. xvii + 366. ISBN: 1-4020-4245-0. €144.00, $189.00, £111.00 (hardback). ISBN: 1-4020-4246-9 (e-book).
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John Dee has proved an endlessly fascinating subject for students of early modern thought almost from the moment of his death. This collection, the somewhat belated proceedings of a conference held at Birkbeck in 1995, is a welcome contribution to a burgeoning field. That conference was held at an opportune moment in Dee scholarship: Nicholas Clulee's meticulous account of Dee as natural philosopher and mathematician, and Andrew Roberts and Julian Watson's study of his library, the finest English collection of its day, had both been published a few years before; William Sherman's account of Dee as a reader must just have appeared. Two major monographs on Dee, by Deborah Harkness and György Szönyi, have since been published as well. All but one of these scholars were present at the conference, and hence are represented in this volume; and although their activity, and that of other Dee aficionados, might be thought to have rendered this volume untimely, the reverse is the case. The contributions testify to the maturity of the field of Dee studies, and bring into focus questions that remain to be answered about Dee personally, and those that concern the relevance of figures like him to historians of science.

Consciously reflecting on the work of their predecessors, many of the authors point to the way in which Dee's work, life and thought have tended to perplex. Even the work of Frances Yates and her followers, to the extent that it was characterized by an entrancement with, rather than an analysis of, the avowedly irrational elements in the work of contemporaries such as Giordano Bruno, tended to mystify. But as this volume demonstrates, we are now past the point at which