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Avicenna's "De anima" in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul, 1160-1300 by Dag Nikolaus Hasse

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Avicenna's "De anima" in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul, 1160-1300 by Dag Nikolaus Hasse

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brought to bear in the process of creation. To cite but one example, in the urban sphere, Marvin Trachtenberg's *Dominion of the Eye* (1997) has drawn attention to the suggestive intersections of the methods by which trecento Florentines shaped their city as a three-dimensional composition of public space and architectural forms with a "nervous mixture" of traditional Aristotelian and newly emergent spatial theories implemented through geometrical construction. Likewise, the chambered framework patiently erected by Dox seems to me exemplary in its capacity to accommodate an analysis of medieval theatrical space based on modern performance studies that then opens into an exposition of the relevance of the fourteenth-century debate on space to the organization of dramatic performances of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. More frequently, we as readers are offered a banquet of specific events, legal regulations, institutional rules, or theological tenets that may have conditioned the spatial parameters of specific architectural, devotional, or dramatic practice; less often is the veil of particulars drawn aside to reveal their location in relation to the defining boundaries set by medieval thought.

Despite the pretense of crossing disciplinary boundaries, *Medieval Practices of Space* does not quite overcome the centrifugal forces that push the humanities apart, and the parts do not manage to coalesce into a greater whole. There is, to be sure, an interdisciplinary gathering between the book's covers, but while subjects may push traditional disciplinary and methodological limits—Camille's extension of the medieval art-historian's view to encompass street signs takes a page from studies in urbanism and modern architecture launched by Kevin Lynch in the 1960s and Robert Venturi in the early 1970s—they do not, to my mind, "perturb" history or historiographic practice, as is rather smugly claimed (p. xvii). To move against those divisive partitions would have required the contributing scholars to "trade places," for, say, Dox to look at the interior of Hosios Loukas in terms of her categories of theatrical space, mutable space, and the space of the imagination, or Conley to merge his consideration of Villon's poetic mapping with a discussion of the spatial, physical, or symbolic structures of the actual city considered by Camille, Smail, and Burroughs. Nevertheless, the theoretical threads, thematic echoes and contrasts, resonating suggestively between the independent atoms of *Medieval Practices of Space*, invite active readers to fashion their own networks of connections between past and present, between spatial theory and artistic practice in the street, the church, or on the page and hint at the ample common ground that awaits future exploration.

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DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE, *Avicenna's "De anima" in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul, 1160–1300*. (Warburg Institute Studies and Texts, 1.) London: Warburg Institute; Turin: Nino Aragno, 2000. Paper. Pp. x, 350 plus 2 unnumbered pages. £32.

This book studies and reassesses the influence of Avicenna's work on the soul in the Latin West. His *De anima* was translated by Avendauth, in collaboration with Gundissalinus, in Toledo sometime between 1152 and 1166, which was the starting point of a successful *Nachleben* in the later Middle Ages, with a peak in the first half of the thirteenth century. Avicenna's text, however, has often suffered from mistranslation and misinterpretation, both by medieval and by modern authors. It was often viewed as an impediment to the proper understanding of Aristotle's philosophy. Hasse's aims, therefore, are to look both at the Arabic original in order to see what Avicenna really meant and at the Scholastic tradition in the Latin West in order to see how Avicenna was translated, read, and interpreted. As an excellent Latinist who is also very competent in reading Arabic, he is well

equipped for these tasks. (A more adequate reflection of these tasks would be a title like “Avicenna’s ‘De anima’ and Its Reception in the Latin West.”)

Of course, from an analytical point of view the two questions are independent from each other. A study of Avicenna’s influence need not necessarily take the Arabic text into account, for it was not used by the Scholastics. Thus, when Hasse writes that studies by modern scholars on Avicenna in the Latin West have as a “common weakness” that “their ‘Avicenna’ is the Avicenna of the Latin translation” (p. vi), the reader may think that this is a sound point of departure for a historian of philosophy. And when he adds that there now “exists a more solid philological and historical basis for a new attempt to comprehend the role of Avicenna” (p. vii), one may think these philological studies of the Arabic text to be irrelevant to an understanding of what the Scholastics made of the *Latin Avicenna*. Hasse, however, convincingly demonstrates how fruitful these two questions can be linked together. A better understanding of Avicenna’s own philosophy, which is only to be had from a knowledge of the original texts, enables him to correct a number of misconceptions of Avicenna’s philosophy by modern Arabists (though debts are also acknowledged), to correct a number of misinterpretations by modern scholars (starting with Etienne Gilson) of Avicenna’s influence in the Latin West, and to chart the various ways in which Avicenna was interpreted by Scholastic authors and how they departed, often unwittingly, from the authentic Avicenna.

After a brief introduction, in which philosophy of the soul before the introduction of Avicenna is sketched, Hasse discusses in part 1 the principal texts that show his impact on Dominicus Gundissalinus, John Blund, Michael Scot, Roland of Cremona, William of Auvergne, Jean de la Rochelle, the *Summa fratris Alexandri*, Petrus Hispanus Portugalensis, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and some authors of anonymous treatises on the soul. Each text is explored for the presence of Avicennian doctrines—a discussion of the contents of these doctrines has to wait for part 2—and for its links with other texts. Hasse has almost always something new to offer: Gundissalinus’s *De anima* is not a mediocre but a clever compilation; John Blund did not use Avicenna as a guide to understanding Aristotle; Scot used Avicenna directly, and his work shows traces of the medical tradition; de la Rochelle’s indebtedness to Avicenna is much greater than a recent critical edition suggests (Hasse points to dozens of quotations that have been overlooked); the whole system of Avicenna’s faculty psychology is worked into Albertus Magnus’s *De anima* (here, too, recent editors have missed a number of borrowings), and so forth. Future work on these texts will have to take Hasse’s findings into account.

While part 1 focuses on sources and relationships between texts, part 2 discusses six Avicennian doctrines and how medieval Scholastics interpreted them: the relationship between body and soul (in a thought experiment called “The Flying Man”), theory of touch (which differs from Aristotle’s), theory of vision, internal sense of estimation (which is lacking in Aristotle), prophecy, and the intellect. Whereas modern scholarship has paid much attention to Avicenna’s theory of the intellect (“too much attention,” Hasse even writes, though he, too, devotes more pages to this theme than to the others), Hasse redresses the balance by treating extensively Avicenna’s account of the soul’s animal and sensitive faculties, an account that went beyond that of Aristotle and had a great, though varied, impact. Some of his theories were almost universally accepted (his many distinctions and definitions of the soul’s faculties, his theory of touch and that of estimation), or at least defended by some authors (on intellectual memory, on media and instruments of the external senses), while other theories were rejected but evoked interesting debates (on prophecy) or were transformed (doctrine of the four intellects, the theory of the separate active intellect).

The story of Avicenna’s impact is one of rise and decline. The decline is well illustrated by Thomas Aquinas’s misinterpretation of Avicenna’s account of intellection, which Aquinas called “Platonic.” Theologians such as Aquinas were increasingly interested in issues

such as the unicity of the possible intellect, universal hylomorphism, and plurality of forms—issues that were not central to Avicenna. On the other hand, the physiological and medical part of Avicenna's psychology was often discarded by theologians, while medical authors based their theories on other sources, including Avicenna's own *Canon*. His *De anima*, though it continued to exercise influence mainly through Albertus Magnus and, at a more popular level, Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum naturale*, never regained the position it had in the first half of the thirteenth century. It is during this relatively short time span that Avicenna was considered to be a major authority, who was read alongside or in addition to Aristotle rather than as a mere commentator on, let alone traitor of, Aristotle's views, as modern scholars have too often seen him. Hasse's list of quotations and adaptations of Avicenna's *De anima*, which forms a substantial part of his book (pp. 234–314), is telling evidence of its direct and indirect impact.

Hasse defends his case well, namely, to consider Avicenna “as a philosopher in his own right,” by which is meant his own reception in the Latin West, rather than as a footnote to Aristotle, be it a culprit or a rebel within the Peripatetic tradition. A minor point of criticism is the structure of the book. The introduction offers only a very brief (one-and-a-half-page) description of Avicenna's psychology, which is discussed at more length in the sections on the doctrines in part 2. The result is that the reader of part 1, which discusses the impact rather than the contents of Avicennian doctrines, has frequently to be referred to these discussions in part 2 (e.g., Avicennized Augustinianism is mentioned on page 22 but explained fully only on page 203; the same with “The Flying Man” argument and the doctrine of the four intellects). A fuller exposition of Avicenna's psychology in the introduction would have been helpful.

That flaw, however, should not detract from the importance of this work. Hasse has written a highly erudite and well-informed book on a central theme in medieval philosophy.

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JOHN HATCHER and MARK BAILEY, *Modelling the Middle Ages: The History and Theory of England's Economic Development*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xiii, 254; 3 black-and-white figures and 1 table. \$19.95.

Students of medieval history read or at least hear about and gesture to—in conversation and in writing—a great many theorists and theories nowadays and have been doing so for quite some time. Much of the theory has been generated in other fields of study, especially psychology, philosophy, and literature, and is not necessarily very new. Historians, someone has said, tend to pick up a theory from another discipline long after the practitioners of that discipline have abandoned it or radically revised it. This is not always the case, of course, and recently historians have emerged on the cutting edge of theoretical sophistication (denigrators might say silliness). In any case, some of the most influential recent theoretical approaches to texts and problems include discourse analysis, deconstruction, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and the cluster of conceptual approaches associated with subaltern studies. Names like Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Michel de Certeau, Gayatri Spivak, and Gyan Prakash appear fairly frequently in medieval historians' footnotes.

One rarely, however, sees footnotes anymore to Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, Max Weber, or even Antonio Gramsci, whose influence was so pervasive twenty years ago. Freud, of course, is a persistent exception. Freudianism has arresting staying power despite systematic and perhaps compelling destructive critiques of it.

John Hatcher and Mark Bailey, two of the best and most prominent historians of the medieval English (rural) economy and institutions, offer students in the book under review