In _The Metaphysics of Everyday Life_, Lynne Rudder Baker sets out her views on several important topics in metaphysics, including personal identity, the ontology of artifacts, time, vagueness, and causation. Central to Baker’s discussion of these topics is her elucidation and defense of the existence and importance of the constitution relation. According to Baker, persons are constituted by bodies but are not identical to them. In fact, all “ordinary objects”—cars, planes, trees, and so forth—are constituted by various mereological sums while not being reducible to such sums. Baker argues that her view captures the natural way we think of artifacts, persons, persistence through time, and causation. She devotes the final part of the book to further defining, refining, and defending what she calls the “metaphysical underpinnings” of her position.

Because the notion of constitution plays such a huge role in the book, someone (like me) who is not convinced by Baker’s reasons for supposing there is such a relation (certainly as it applies to material objects) will get less out of the book than someone who believes she makes her case. That said, Baker may reasonably argue that the initial motivation for believing in constitution is less important than the theoretical and explanatory benefits she goes on to adduce. In what remains of this review, I will highlight why I find Baker’s appeal to constitution insufficiently motivated and offer one objection to her view of persons.

In order to motivate her view of ordinary objects, Baker asks what we should say, ontologically speaking, about what happened when the towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed. She contrasts three views. Eliminativism says that the towers do not exist (and never did). All that happens is that certain mereological atoms change their arrangement. Reductionism claims that the towers are mereological sums of particles (and that any particles you like compose a sum). We give the name “tower” to some such arrangements of particles. Nonreductionism says that the towers are something over and above mereological sums. Baker believes that Nonreductionism is the only view of the three that takes the irreducible reality of the towers seriously enough. Nonreductionism, as she formulates it, leads very naturally to her constitution view.

My problem with this way of motivating her view is that it ignores or misconstrues some very natural ways of understanding what happens to the towers.
Consider the idea that the particles compose the towers (and only the towers) and that, after the attack occurs, the towers stop existing and the particles now compose nothing at all. Alternatively, consider the idea that the particles compose the towers (and only the towers) and that, after the attack occurs, the towers stop existing and the particles from each tower now compose two scattered objects (and only those objects) distinct from the towers. These views have no need of Baker’s constitution relation, yet they take the ontological status of the towers very seriously. The towers really do go out of existence after the attack. Baker does not consider such natural ideas. She also dismisses too readily the reductionist accounts she examines. Four-dimensionalist reductionists who believe that the towers are just one of many temporal worms in existence can quite easily say that the towers have many important properties that other temporal worms lack. Baker suggests that for such philosophers the destruction of the towers “should be understood in conceptual or semantic terms, not in ontological terms” (29). But I see no reason why her opponent should accept this. Certain worms that had important physical and social properties no longer exist. Other worms that continue existing as rubble did have such important properties but now lack them.

This last point relates to Baker’s tendency to assume that, unless one believes Fs are essentially Fs, one does not take the existence of Fs seriously. A person may think that Fs are very important and robustly real without having to believe that they are essentially Fs. Baker says in defense of her idea that automobiles are essentially automobiles that it “would be bizarre to suppose that instruments of such monumental change were not kinds of genuine substances, or lacked ontological status” (66). This seems equally true, however, of children. Children are genuine substances and have “ontological status.” Baker herself, however, believes that children are not essentially children. Does this mean Baker does not take children ontologically seriously? The natural answer is that children are not ontologically special qua children but are so qua persons. Furthermore, the property of being a child, though not essential to whoever has it, is important in many other ways. It seems similarly reasonable to say that automobiles may not be ontologically special qua automobiles but that the property of being an automobile is an important one. It is very unclear to me that common sense is committed to rejecting this picture in favor of Baker’s, according to which automobiles are essentially automobiles. Can’t we easily imagine a car being converted into a boat, without thinking it stops existing? And if we can, does that somehow lessen the reality of cars?

Baker’s own account of material objects is open to various objections. I have space to mention only one. Baker’s account of persons seems committed to the view that there are two persons coexisting in the same place at the same time (the person and the body that constitutes him or her, which Baker says is a person derivatively), which is absurd. Baker’s reply is that this objection assumes a view of counting objects that she rejects. When one counts persons, one should count the person and the body that constitutes her as one person (173).
The problem with this approach is threefold. First, it still seems highly problematic that there exists a person, x, in a certain location and a person, y, who is not identical to x, in that exact same location. Even if one can legitimately count them as one person, this does not resolve the initial worry. Second, it is extremely natural to count by identity. It serves as the default view of counting from which we should deviate only if completely necessary. Third, on Baker’s view of counting, she is compelled to deny this seemingly obvious principle: the number of Fs equals the number of Fs that are (F in a G way) plus the number of Fs that are not (F in a G way). For instance, the number of aggressive people equals the number of aggressive people who are aggressive in a passive way plus the number of aggressive people who are not aggressive in a passive way. It follows from this principle that the number of people equals the number of people who are people in a derivative way plus the number of people who are not people in a derivative way. Given this principle and Baker’s constitution view, there are (at least) double the number of people we think there are. Baker must thus reject this very plausible principle.

I have concentrated on topics where I am not sympathetic with Baker’s views. This should not be taken to imply that I did not find many of her ideas insightful. Baker’s elucidation of the notion of the first-person perspective is highly perceptive. Many of her insights about persons are independent of her views about constitution and can be used by those who believe that a person is simply a body. Baker’s careful response to Kim’s exclusion argument also deserves plenty of attention. In her discussion of time, Baker ingeniously rescues the idea that, even though the past and future are real, there is something special about the present (some event counts as occurring now if it occurs simultaneously with an event of which a person is now “judgmentally aware”). Baker is to be commended for creating a coherent and clear metaphysics of the everyday. The Metaphysics of Everyday Life presents a view of the world that many will find compelling and with which opponents will have to seriously contend.

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In this volume Charles Larmore assembles nine essays published between 1999 and 2004, as well as a substantial and previously unpublished chapter on the autonomy of morality. The first part of the book, “Reason and Reasons,” argues that modern moral philosophy misconceives the relation between mind and world and consequently misplaces the source of the authority of reasons. On the naturalist model characteristic of modernity, reason is the active faculty that produces reasons and invests the world with its normativity. By contrast, Larmore insists that “the world contains a normative dimension to which our reason is responsive” (9). Reasons are irreducible normative relations that obtain independently of the contribution of the mind and to which the mind is responsive insofar as it is rational. The second part of the book, “The Moral Point of View,” contains the main negative argument, which is the driving motive and common theme of the essays; it attacks the Kantian claim that the authority of morality derives from the pure activity of reason, which is a self-legislating enterprise. On Larmore’s account, the claim about the independence of morality is a crippling source of confusion, whose consequences are especially detrimental in ethics and politics. The third part, “Political Principles,” is meant to show how deeply the Kantian misconception of reason as a self-legislating activity affects the liberal understanding of democracy. While Larmore counts himself as an advocate of liberalism, he thinks that “Rawls failed to find the right overall framework for his thought” (71), and thus failed to provide liberalism with the appropriate foundation. Larmore’s proposal is to supply a moral ontology and ground liberalism on an unconstructed moral value: respect for persons. Respect for persons has authority prior to and independently of the democratic order itself (9), and thereby makes democracy possible, Larmore argues. In the fourth and final part of the book, “Truth and Chance,” Larmore explores the substantial issue of what makes for our flourishing life and undermines the plausibility of conceiving of living well in terms of living according to a plan. The kind of self-mastery required in planning one’s life is a flawed ideal, which underestimates how deeply contingency and change shape life and inform its conditions of success.

There is much to appreciate in Larmore’s unabashed defense of moral realism. Its most distinctive merit consists in making room for contingency and history within a realist framework. One needs to attend to the actual circumstances in order to ascertain the reasons, and these circumstances are sensitive to time and subject to change. This concern with historicity, the most valuable part of Hegel’s legacy, makes no concession to transcendence. If Larmore’s acute sense of contingency seems to align him with pragmatism, it is soon obvious

I would like to thank James Bondarchuk, Nataliya Palatnik, and Paul Schofield for their comments.
where they part ways. In response to Richard Rorty, Larmore argues that the very practice of justification makes no sense without a substantive conception of truth as correspondence, in the sense of “fitting the way the world really is” (28). We come to grasp reasons through a learning process, which does not always grant access to truth, but truth itself is timeless and independent of our imperfect efforts to reach it. Larmore’s allegiance to a Platonist form of realism also explains his dissatisfaction with John McDowell’s treatment of the receptivity of the mind to the world. In particular, Larmore contends that McDowell concedes too much to naturalism when he places the source of normativity in education and upbringing, rather than recognizing reasons as parts of the ontological furnishing of the world (47–60).

How successful a moral theory of this sort might be depends crucially on its details. As presented here, however, Larmore’s theory stands in need of further elaboration and defense. It is thus difficult to judge whether it delivers what it promises about the historicity of reasons and thus really improves upon traditional forms of realism. For instance, he sounds at risk of ontological extravagance when he says that moral reasons belong to “a third ontological dimension of the world” (63). This strong claim is unnecessary to support the irreducible normativity of moral reasons and their relational and historical nature, and thus it is redundant (11, 63). Kantians (as well as other nonrealists) would concede that reasons are irreducible normative relations that are sensitive to circumstances. Unlike Larmore, they have the obvious advantage of avoiding any talk of a mysterious dimension of reality.

Furthermore, whether the conception of reason as a receptive faculty supports moral realism importantly depends on how receptivity is cast. What does the recognition of reasons involve? Again, Kantians may agree that to be rational is to be sensitive and responsive to reasons; they differ as to whether such sensitivity and responsiveness is a totally passive or active affair. Larmore acknowledges an inherent link between reason and freedom, as he interprets freedom as “the ability to be moved by reasons, instead of by mere causes” (45). It is hard to understand how the connection between freedom and reason is preserved if the faculty of reason is totally passive.

The dichotomy between receptivity and activity is at the core of arguments about the source of the authority of reasons. According to Larmore, Kant and contemporary Kantian constructivists miss the realistic root of the normativity of reasons, and thus fail to explain how moral claims have genuine authority. His objection is that self-legislation is an activity that makes sense only after we have recognized reasons as valid. Constructivism is thus incomplete (or unstable) because it builds upon a realist foundation: it has to presume the antecedent validity of some moral principles, for example, the principles of reasonableness (83–84). To be genuinely authoritative, reason must be answerable to the external world, which warrants that it does not go astray in its representations.
Larmore’s attack is powerful enough to seriously undermine the voluntarist (and subjectivist) theories, which reduce the normative force of reasons to a mere subjective decision. Whether Kantian constructivism amounts to a subjectivist form of voluntarism is, however, doubtful. Indeed, Kant holds that a principle cannot bind a rational agent unless it is one that the agent legislates. But this is not to say that one is bound by requirements because one legislates them. In fact, Kant’s appeal to self-legislation is meant to elucidate the constitutive principles of the rational will, as opposed to the will of any one rational agent (Reath 2006, 92–170; Korsgaard 2008, 207–29). This distinction counts against reading Kant’s constructivism as a form of subjectivist voluntarism.

To prove his point, Larmore rightly focuses on Kant’s appeal to the “fact of Reason,” a rather obscure argument that is unsurprisingly found missing in contemporary defenses of constructivism (113). Whether the fact of Reason really proves Kant to be a moral realist is, however, far from clear. The question revolves around the status and role of reverence for the legislating activity and its alleged equivalence to respect for humanity. The framework of the discussion is the structure of the rational will, which is supposed to be self-authenticating insofar as it is self-legisitating. As Karl Ameriks remarks, for Kant the autonomy of reason does not simply refer to the origin of principles but concerns the logical form of the law (Ameriks 2003, 274–82). This is not to deny, as Larmore suggests in his reply to Ameriks (46), that Kant’s appeal to self-legislation is meant to address the issue of authority. The argument from the fact of Reason is directed to show exactly the authority of moral reasons and our sensitivity or responsiveness to the demands of morality (Kant [1795] 1902, 5:42–43, 46–48). This is an integral part of Kant’s project of vindicating the objectivity of the moral law, which amounts to showing that pure reason not only provides the standards of valid reasoning but is also capable of producing motives—in other words, that pure reason is practical.

Interestingly, Kant accounts for authority independently of validity. Whether a consideration counts as a valid moral reason is determined by the standards of the moral law, and thus independently of the subjectivity and self-representation of agents. By contrast, authority names the subjective mode in which validity is experienced. Without authority, the moral law would be valid but inert, a mere idea without application. Authority is felt in the guise of respect. Therefore, for Kant, respect (for the law-making activity and for persons, by an equivalence that certainly requires further argument) plays a crucial role in the justification of morality. Moreover, the objectivity of the moral law requires that we are responsive (or receptive) to reasons. But this is no concession to moral realism. To see why, consider that respect plays no epistemological role; it is not the source of moral cognition. Rather, respect is the aspect of our sensibility that makes us responsive to the requirements of reasons by directly providing us with a moral motive. It is the receptive (and yet not passive) aspect of the objectivity of the moral law as it works in self-reflective embodied minds (or animals endowed with reason). That we are capable of acquiring an interest in morality shows that
reason is genuinely authoritative. The idea that practical reason “must construct out of itself its own object” (Rawls 2002, 226) is thus not the move that severs the relation between reason and the world, but the one that secures such a relation by (ideally) identifying the appropriate moral motives.

Correctly understood, the claim about the autonomy and sovereignty of reason decides the central issue that Larmore addresses, the justification of morality (69–85). Larmore sides with M. Prichard in refusing to answer the normative question because it is ill-formed or unintelligible from within the practice of morality. He takes contemporary Kantians to be asking for reasons why we should be moral, and thus to be searching for an external source for validating morality, via self-interest or rational freedom. But for Kantian constructivists, reason is a self-conscious and self-authenticating activity. They clearly do not share the view that morality needs an external foundation. On the contrary, they think that in forming our intentions and beliefs we are answerable to criteria of correctness that are internal to the very exercise of rationality (Korsgaard 2008, 13–15, 110–26, 207–29). Whether successful or not, the search for internal criteria of authentication represents a third option besides refusing and searching for an external foundation. It certainly has the merit of casting the issue of the justification of morality in a way that does not make it spurious or insulated from other domains of rationality.

In light of these considerations, it is hard to agree with Larmore’s diagnosis that constructivism builds upon a realist foundation (84), and to dismiss it as “an untenable account of what makes for the authority of moral and political principles” (71). It looks as though Kantian constructivism is preoccupied with “the responsiveness to reasons which reasoning involves” (86) and represents a genuine alternative to moral realism. Until issues concerning the ontology and epistemology of reasons are further clarified and qualified, it seems premature to conclude that “if morality is a rational enterprise there is no way around having to recognize that we take our moral bearings from an independent order of right and wrong” (84).

That said, Larmore’s book should be welcomed as a fundamental contribution to moral and political theory, as it directly and fruitfully addresses two themes that deserve to be the focus of philosophical debate, the objectivity of morality and the historicity of reasons.

References


Most contemporary philosophical accounts of beauty have a decidedly Kantian flavor and can therefore often be overly clinical and frustratingly aloof, beauty as divorced from rather than entwined with the everyday world. In stark contrast to this, Alexander Nehamas’s Only a Promise of Happiness offers a refreshingly intimate, impassioned, and accessible account of beauty, an account that returns beauty to its more romantic and also more dangerous roots.

In the first section, Nehamas addresses the change over time undergone by philosophical approaches to beauty—the moral of which appears to be “Plato was right, Kant was wrong.” For Plato, beauty is sensual, pervasive, and passionate, the driving force behind philosophy itself. On such accounts, beauty is a province of the everyday world, evoking and inseparable from strong desire, forging an intimate connection with practical and ethical interests. Kant’s account of beauty, however, signals an end of the connection between beauty and desire. For Kant, both the agreeable and the good are robustly dependent on desire or interest; the beautiful contrastingly requires the absence of such dependence—a thing’s beauty must be independent from that thing’s purpose, use, or value. As Nehamas rightly observes, this highly influential notion of beauty marks the beginning of the end for a plebian notion of beauty in favor of a highly intellectualized notion, specifically a notion of beauty in the arts as separate and distinct from the everyday world.

In the last century while modernism waged war on the value and place of beauty in the arts, contemporary philosophy, following Kant’s lead, proceeded to de-fang, sterilize, and rarely beauty—arguably reaching its absurd conclusion in Clive Bell’s idea of significant form. For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, philosophical aesthetics has been dominated by the attempt to define art in aesthetic terms while preserving the art object/natural object
divide. Lumping beauty in with other aesthetic properties (for example, daintiness, elegance), Nehamas contends, further distances beauty from the everyday world in favor of more dispassionately analytic (and far more ill-defined and problematic) neo-Kantian notions like the “aesthetic attitude,” “aesthetic experience,” and “aesthetic disinterestedness.” As a result beauty becomes by association a distinctly surface property, exhausted by appearance—little mystery then why modernism rejected the value of beauty in art.

Nehamas then draws a parallel between the interplay of criticism and evaluation and the judgment of beauty. Should a critic inform me of all of the descriptive features of an artwork, this fails to inform me how I will be affected; I must see for myself. “If I trust the reviewer and find the praise tempting enough, I will look at the work for myself, hoping to like it but not in order to do so” (53). Likewise, for Nehamas, judgments of beauty are not verdicts, proceeding from analysis and reflection on experience; rather judgments of beauty are commitments to the future. This is the crux of Nehamas’s account of beauty. Hand in hand go beauty and desire (though desire that refuses to disclose its purpose). Should I find an object beautiful, I desire to have that object in my life, to devote part of my life, however small, to it. Since, for Nehamas, beauty is always, though never completely, manifest in appearance, the reasons for me finding something beautiful are never fully available to me. If I find an object beautiful, I believe that there is more to learn, more to come, and what is yet to come is worth my devotion. Of course, we all know these things can go horribly awry; beauty is, after all, only a promise of happiness. This reveals a darkly tragic (or darkly comic) element to beauty, that is, beauty sparks the desire to understand only to vanish once understood.

Nehamas cleverly avoids discussing judgments of beauty in terms of objectivity and subjectivity, opting for the more nuanced notions of the communal and the personal. When I judge something to be beautiful, according to Nehamas, I do not, as a Kantian might think, command universal agreement. Judgments of beauty are personal, and communities are established around such judgments of beauty, yet no community is universal. Moreover, this is exactly the state of affairs we ought to prefer. What frightens Nehamas, and rightly so, is not finding out, per his example, that everyone likes *Baywatch* but finding out that everyone likes the same thing regardless of what that thing may be. Since judgments of beauty for Nehamas come prepackaged with a host of unanswered questions, they may subtly or drastically direct the course of one’s life, leading one to “other people, other objects, other habits and ways of being” (85).

Nehamas ends the book by detailing his love affair with Manet’s *Olympia*. Part of finding an artwork or a person beautiful is trying to understand the reasons for finding it beautiful, to come to know and fully understand it (and consequently to no longer find it beautiful). To know and understand the object of
beauty is to understand how that object is distinct from everything else, and so, Nehamas argues, beauty enjoins interaction with rather than distance from the everyday world. Of course, Nehamas correctly points out that artworks are no better or worse at being objects of beauty than nonart, and as such, he is able to keep his notion of beauty separate and distinct from notions of art and artworld functions. For Nehamas there is no artworld beauty versus plebian beauty, no refined versus unrefined beauty, no beauty versus beauty*—there is just beauty. Finding an artwork beautiful promises no more or less happiness than finding a rock formation or a lover beautiful. Each thing found beautiful promises happiness unique to it, but all such promises share a darkly capricious nature.

*Only a Promise of Happiness* obviously targets a much wider audience than professional philosophers, so much so that I suspect that art critics and art historians would get much more out of the book than philosophers of art. The first section of the book, however, should be required reading in any course on beauty if only to act as a cautionary tale, reminding us just how sanitized contemporary notions of beauty have become. The remainder of the book should be seen less as a rigorous, positive account of beauty and more as a template for a rigorous, positive account of beauty. One of the book’s more frustrating aspects is that Nehamas (admittedly) offers decidedly imprecise accounts of some particularly troublesome notions, most notably with respect to interpretation (its objects, goals, and where it begins and ends) and what it is to be an aesthetic feature. Moreover, by making judgments of beauty identical to the “spark of desire,” Nehamas’s account merely raises more questions, questions that cannot be answered by appeal to the far too broad and imprecise notion of devotional desire employed. *Only a Promise of Happiness* should be seen less as providing an account of beauty and more as imparting a lesson about what we ought to demand of any such account, namely that beauty essentially involves desire and that the judgments of beauty we make inform us about the world as well as inform the world about us.

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Plotinus obviously read and thought about Plato a great deal. Yet his student Porphyry, in his *Life of Plotinus*, took pains to emphasize that his master’s philosophical interests and influences extended way beyond the *Corpus Platonicum*. He tells us that much Peripatetic and Stoic material is contained in the *Enneads* and that treatises by Severus, Cronius, Numenius, Gaius, Atticus, Aspasius, and Alexander were all read in the seminars (VP 14). What is striking about this list is that it shows that Porphyry’s real concern was to make clear that Plotinus had been keeping up with the philosophical literature produced since Plato’s time, which raises the question of Plotinus’s knowledge of and engagement with Preplatonic philosophy. To this interesting and important question Giannis Stamatellos has now devoted an entire monograph.

This is surely a timely study. With the viability of the traditional distinction between genuine fragments and mere testimonies coming increasingly under fire and the massive new multivolume edition of the Presocratics by Gemelli Marciano, McKirahan, Primavesi, Riedweg, Strohmaier, and Wöhrle already well under way (an edition that aims to provide a level of completeness that Diels’s pedagogically oriented volumes were never intended to achieve in its documentation of the transmission of early Greek philosophy throughout classical and late antiquity), this seems to be the perfect time to reflect on a cluster of issues surrounding late antique philosophers and the Presocratics. Indeed, Stamatellos’s book raises a number of problems worthy of study, most of which go in one of two obviously not unrelated interrogative directions: What can we learn about Plotinus from the Presocratics? And what can we learn about the Presocratics from Plotinus?

In the former direction we encounter a series of questions having to do with the influence that the Presocratics had on Plotinus, which, as the book’s subtitle makes clear, represent Stamatellos’s primary focus. Here Stamatellos appears to have three central aims. He wants to show, first, that Plotinus has inherited concepts and terminology from the Presocratics, second, that Plotinus generally treats the Presocratics with reverence and is interested in showing his philosophy as being continuous with the older Greek tradition to which they belong, and third, that he remains nonetheless critical of the Presocratics, though his criticisms are largely original and the result of his approaching the Presocratics as serious philosophers engaged in the same kind of project that he is. In the other direction Stamatellos wants to correct a perceived bias against Plotinus as a source of information on early Greek philosophy. Whereas scholars of Plotinus and the Presocratics alike have traditionally been skeptical of Plotinus’s value here, Stamatellos insists that many previously disregarded passages from the *Enneads* are of “great philosophical and doxographical
importance” to our understanding of the Presocratics (140). Stamatellos advances toward these goals thematically, with separated chapters devoted to the One (23–58), Intellect and Being (59–88), Eternity and Time (89–134), and Matter and Soul (135–72), followed by an appendix (177–95) and an index fontium (255–58). Stamatellos follows roughly the same method in each chapter, first giving a very helpful overview of the Plotinian theory, then discussing selected conceptually related ideas from the Presocratics—often giving synopses of scholarly disputes over their interpretation—and ultimately arguing for some connection between the former and the latter that advances the aims outlined above.

Stamatellos does a good job at developing readings of the Presocratics that make the parallels with Plotinus more obvious. He presents many striking examples and generally succeeds in showing that Plotinus had a much more active engagement with the Presocratics than was previously thought. Stamatellos’s discussion of Parmenides is particularly effective, with concrete conclusions being reached in each of the above directions. Although the Eleatics did employ the monistic language of the “One,” Plotinus consistently related their accounts to his Intellect, and in addition to elucidating a number of aspects of this Eleatic influence, Stamatellos turns around and argues that Plotinus’s routine use of άτρεμές in connection with the realm of Being provides good additional reason for retaining the άτρεμές (over άτρεκές, as suggested by some Parmenides scholars) in Parmenides fr. 1.29 (88). Elsewhere, however, the connections drawn between the Presocratics and Plotinus seem much more tenuous. Often Stamatellos appears content to show that certain ideas or concepts that were first articulated in some form by a Presocratic are still to be found in the *Enneads*, regardless of whether this inheritance was direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious. Thus we often encounter rather vague language of Plotinus “echoing” the Presocratics. When Plotinus identifies eternity with the life of the forms, is he really being influenced by Empedocles’ concept of ζωή as endless life (119)? Likewise, is Plotinus’s account of the circular motion of fire in II.2.1.27–37 really influenced by Presocratic appeals to a vortex (132)? Does Plotinus’s apophatism of the One really owe a “significant” debt to Anaximander’s negative predication of the ἄπειρον (35)? These are all described as cases of Plotinus “echoing” Presocratics, but surely are doubtful cases of substantial influence. All of these “references,” “allusions,” and “echoes” are then cataloged in an appendix, which aims to collect the passages from the *Enneads* in which one finds “direct and indirect references to the text of Presocratic fragments,” by which Stamatellos means that the reference must have at least one significant word in common with the fragment, and in an index fontium, which includes all of these references plus references to testimonies as well as other references containing no overlap in terminology. I am very sympathetic to this compilation project, though the boundaries of inclusion are sure to be blurry, as is well illustrated by the cases of Anaxagoras’s ὁμώ πάντα (B1.1, B4.3, and B6.7 D–K) and Pherecydes’ description of the
Dyad as τόλμα (B14 D–K). Surely not every occurrence of these expressions should be counted as a reference to these Presocratic thinkers, as Stamatellos acknowledges (for example, 20), yet Stamatellos proposes credible principles of inclusion, for example, only those instances of τόλμα and τόλμαν where the generation of plurality is at issue (170) are references to Phercydes. This is solid methodology, though given the nature of the project, the results are sure to be contentious. (Why include III.6.18.35–6 and VI.3.1.17 as references to Anaxagoras’s ὁμοῦ πάντα but not include II.4.11.16, V.8.10.18, VI.6.15.3, VI.7.2.53, and especially VI.2.2.20–21 ὁμοῦ μιγνύντες ἄλληλοις τὰ πάντα? This is made more difficult by Stamatellos’s discussion on pages 56–57, where he concludes “we cannot assume that Plotinus traces back to Anaxagoras in the above passages,” yet all of the passages in question [listed in footnotes 167–72] are included in the index fontium.)

It is worth noting that at times the discussion is more streamlined than is advantageous to such a project. For example, although Stamatellos devotes a full five pages (123–28) to a discussion of II.1.2.10–12 and its relation to Heraclitus fr. 6, many important issues are left untouched. Conche (Héraclite Fragments [Paris 1986]) has questioned the scope of fr. 6, in particular whether Aristotle’s ἀλλὰ ἂν ἔνας συνεχῶς is indeed a part of the original fragment, and while Plotinus’s ἂνι seems relevant to this debate, Stamatellos leaves all of this aside. More troubling still is that Stamatellos simply gives the text of H-S² (Συγχωρῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τούτων δηλονότι τὸ Ἡρακλείτω, δεξίη ἂν καὶ τὼν ἴλιον γίνεσθαι) without any acknowledgment that H-S³ emend καὶ τὸν το καὶ ἔνα in order to allow for a closer parallel with Aristotle’s Meteo. 355a12–14, which they assume to be Plotinus’s source. This omission is particularly problematic since Stamatellos wants to challenge their assumption and make Plato’s Cratylus 402a the source. (But H-S must be correct. Unlike the Meteorology, the Cratylus makes no specific mention of the sun, and the reference to “so-called nourishment” in II.1.4.3 provides additional evidence for the Meteorology as the source here [see Wilberding, Plotinus’ Cosmology (Oxford 2006), ad II.1.4.3]). Yet these are precisely the issues that a book like this should be providing authoritative conclusions on.

All in all this is a successful book, though one that leaves much room for future studies. The real question that we would like answered is not whether there are some remnants of Presocratic thought in the Enneads—obviously there are—but rather to what extent (if any) Presocratic ideas are finding their way directly into the Enneads without being predigested by earlier Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics such as the ones Porphyry lists in VP 14; but this appears to be a question in which Stamatellos has only limited interest. Evaluating the extent to which Heraclitus, for example, is directly influencing Plotinus would require much more engagement with the Stoics than one finds here. Likewise, Stamatellos’s conclusion that “Plotinus’ interpretation indicates a much closer acquaintance with Presocratic texts and a better understanding of their ways of
thinking than does Plato (and indeed Aristotle)” (173) lacks the support that only a more thorough examination of Plato and Aristotle could provide. The question, in other words, is whether there are Presocratic ideas that are not found in Plato and Postplatonic philosophy but that do turn up again in the *Enneads*. One avenue of exploration here that strikes me as rather promising concerns Plotinus’s somewhat shocking thesis of III.8 that all life is a form of contemplation. This is at least arguably better represented in Presocratic philosophy (compare Thales A22 D–K, Diogenes B5 D–K, and Empedocles B110 D–K) than in Plato and Postplatonic philosophers. Another might be Plotinus’s interpretation in II.1.6–7 of Plato’s *Timaeus* 31b4–32c4, as this *Timaeus* passage was often understood in an Anaxagorean manner to mean that all elements had to be mixed in with each other (for example, Simplicius *In DC* 17.25–26, Philoponus *Against Proclus* 514.13–16, Proclus *In Tim*. 2.42.28ff.), though even here the Stoics might have prepared the way (see A. Graeser, *Plotinus and the Stoics* [Leiden 1972], 37–28). Be that as it may, Porphyry and Stamatellos are surely both right to remind us that Plato, even if he is Plotinus’s foremost philosophical authority, is only one of many figures that we encounter in the *Enneads*.

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Jonathan Barnes, *Truth, etc.: Six Lectures on Ancient Logic.*

This book contains a revised version of Jonathan Barnes’s 2004 John Locke Lectures, the masterly synthesis of a lifetime’s study of ancient logic. It covers, though not in a strictly systematic manner, a very extensive territory, confronting many of the subject’s major issues and indulging along the way in a number of divagations, theoretical or erudite. It is as acute, rigorous, clear, learned, and witty as you would expect it to be. Anyone working in the history of logic will want to meditate upon this magnificent work.

The book is strongly focused on the texts, in the sense that Barnes proceeds by translating relevant ancient passages (even fairly long ones), always adding the original in a footnote, and then going on to discuss them in considerable detail, often substantiating his remarks by means of further quotations. Thus the book constitutes, among other things, a formidable collection of texts; and part of the reason why it “can be read in an armchair,” as the jacket
half-jokingly states, is that it is (to some extent) a self-sufficient tool. Barnes’s decision to dispense altogether with references to scholarly literature is probably also intended to balance the amount of space taken up by this wealth of primary material.

Chapter 1 addresses a number of issues concerning ancient views on truth. It centers on Cicero’s report that Chrysippus took pains to prove, whereas Epicurus had denied, that “every assertible is true or false” (De fato 21). Barnes gives a clear reconstruction of this ancient quarrel about bivalence (23–27), which had to do with future contingents. Both parties agreed that bivalence about future contingents entails determinism about them; and while Chrysippus accepted both things, Epicurus rejected both.

Besides exploring this larger context, Barnes identifies several differences between Chrysippus’s bivalence thesis itself and the modern Principle of Bivalence. The most interesting one is that “in the Chrysippean thesis—and in ancient logic quite generally—truth-values are timed,” not timeless as in post-Frege philosophy of logic. Barnes devotes a long discussion (5–64) to this fact and to its most important consequence, namely that it is possible for a truthbearer to change its truth-value through time, as Aristotle explicitly states in Categories 5. Perhaps his main reason for rejecting the Aristotelian view is this: “Let truth-values change from time to time if you will—but in that case, consistency requires you to let them vary from place to place and from person to person” (50). He especially insists on the parallel between time and place and exploits it to argue that “in general, where at first blush it seems plausible to find a single assertible which has different truth-values at different times or in different places, at second blush things are seen to be otherwise: either there is a single assertible, and it is false [because it lacks necessary qualifications of time/place], or else there are two or more assertibles with different truth-values” (55).

Chapter 2 is about predication. Among other things, Barnes discusses the relation between the name/verb distinction and the subject/predicate distinction and asks what subjects and predicates are supposed to be in Aristotelian logic (100–123). With regard to the latter question, he shows that Porphyry’s answer, that subjects and predicates are linguistic expressions, is at least as good as the rival answer that they are entities, because the Aristotelian texts vacillate.

One of the chapter’s most interesting sections deals with the role of singular terms in Aristotle’s syllogistic (154–67). Barnes argues—convincingly—that some of Aristotle’s examples and theoretical pronouncements in the Analytics actually commit him to acknowledging some role for singular terms. This is of course problematic; for only quantified sentences may feature in Aristotelian syllogistic, and singular terms do not take quantifiers. Barnes’s suggested way of finding quantifiers for singular subjects (which he partly grounds in a peculiar construal of An. Pr. 47b35–36) is to paraphrase any singular subject ‘X’ as ‘item which is the same as X’. Thus ‘Socrates is pale’ becomes ‘item which is the
same as Socrates is pale’—an *indefinite* sentence, which we can interpret either as particular or, equivalently, as universal.

Earlier (142–54) Barnes discusses the views of Aristotle and his commentators on the transitivity of predication. He spots some remarks in Porphyry and Simplicius which appear to imply that it is not predication in general that is transitive but only what the *Categories* calls predication “as-of-a-subject,” namely *essential* predication. This view entails disastrous consequences for syllogistic, which rests on the assumption that universal affirmative predication is in general transitive. Indeed, Barnes blames the commentators’ false view on Aristotle’s *Categories*, where predication as-of-a-subject is said to be transitive. But I do not see why this—or any other piece of evidence I know of—should imply that the *Categories* denies that *generic* predication is transitive as well, namely that inferences like ‘Capable-of-laughing holds of musical; musical holds of Socrates; therefore capable-of-laughing holds of Socrates’ are valid.

In chapter 3 Barnes turns to ancient conceptions of *connectors* (his translation of the Greek σύνδεσμος). Most of the chapter (168–216) is devoted to establishing that no ancient philosopher or grammarian (not even Apollonius Dyscolus, despite what is often thought) held, or held consistently, the view that the main if not the only function of such words as ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if’, and so forth is to connect whole sentences. Thus, for example, the Stoics conceived of connectors as linking individual parts of speech to one another—which led them to reckon prepositions among them. This is especially striking in light of the fact that sentential connectives played a vital role in Stoic logic.

Chapter 4 investigates to what extent the ancient logicians were theoretically alive to the notion of an argument’s being valid in virtue of its instantiating a certain *logical form*, in what terms they expressed that notion, and how they concretely specified the logical form of an argument (286–98).

The ancient logicians often specify a logical form both *descriptively* (for example, “There is a syllogism which, from a conditional and the opposite of its consequent, infers the opposite of its antecedent”: this is what Alexander of Aphrodisias calls a “circumscription”) and *schematically* (“If the 1st, the 2nd; but not the 2nd; therefore not the 1st”: this is called a “mode” in Stoic logic). Barnes notes that sometimes there is a mismatch between the two specifications, in that the former is more general than the latter. This is doubtless right, generally speaking; but I am not equally convinced by all of Barnes’s examples. In the above case he holds that the circumscription is, while the mode is not, instantiated by the argument ‘If she is not in Italy, then she is not in Milan; but she is in Milan; therefore she is in Italy’. He could at least have considered the possibility that the Stoics, who assumed that ‘P’ is logically equivalent to ‘not-not-P’ (Diogenes Laertius 7.69), regarded the argument as instantiating a logically equivalent mode, and hence the mode as essentially matching the circumscription.
From the relationship between circumscriptions and schemata Barnes moves on to consider schemata in their own right (322–59). He offers a nice discussion of the use of numerals (“the 1st”, “the 2nd”) as stand-ins for “assertibles” in Stoic modes. Then he comes to the use of letters in the Analytics and analyzes such Aristotelian formulas as “the A holds of none of the Bs.” The comparison with the use of letters in Greek geometry, and indeed the reasonable hypothesis that Aristotle’s use of letters actually derives from geometry, suggests that the Aristotelian letters in their typical use are not variables but constants, namely stand in for “determinate predicative expressions” (as they sometimes do on any interpretation). Likewise the letters in geometry designate individual geometrical entities, which geometers “set out” in order to conduct their proof in relation to an individual case that eventually becomes the basis for a universal generalization; likewise in natural deduction systems the letters ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’, and so forth are used as singular terms, to which a rule of universal generalization is applied.

This much constitutes a fairly standard picture, which Barnes enriches in two ways. First, he shows that it has some footing—however insecure—in the work of some ancient commentators. Secondly, he asks how exactly the letters can manage to express universality. Barnes rails against the view that the individual constants of contemporary logic designate arbitrarily chosen objects: random selection does not protect you from the danger of unwarranted generalizations. “What matters . . . is not how the individual objects are chosen but how they are employed: whether the objects are called up at random or elected after the most punctilious examination, things will go well if and only if no appeal is made to any of their peculiarities” (351). So the letters must have a determinate meaning—which however it is up to us (to each of us) to determine as we wish. This is the real guarantee of the proof’s universality.

Very subtle; and yet there remains room for some marginal complaint. On the one hand, in his criticism Barnes takes ‘arbitrary’ to mean ‘random’; but ‘arbitrary’ may also mean precisely ‘up to us to determine as we please’—as when we say that the meaning of ordinary names is arbitrary. On the other, Barnes could have mentioned Posterior Analytics 1.4, where Aristotle says that something holds universally only if it is proved “of a chance case” (ἐπὶ τοῦ τυχόντος): is he, after all, thinking of randomly selected objects?

Chapter 5 starts with an excellent account of Aristotelian syllogistic as an axiomatized deductive system. Then it turns to the alleged “perfection” or evident validity of first figure syllogisms (378–419). Barnes argues that Aristotle takes the evident validity of first figure syllogisms to be underwritten by the dictum de omni et nullo, namely by the meaning of the expressions “[predicated] of every” and “[predicated] of no” as explained in Prior Analytics 1.1. Barnes goes through several possible ways of making sense of this and rejects them all, coming to a drastic and depressing conclusion: “no predicative syllogism, pace Aristotle and his Peripatetics, is perfect” (417).
The remainder of the chapter (419–47) is devoted to “Galen’s metatheorem,” according to which the validity of most syllogisms depends on the truth of universal axioms. Barnes advances the elegant suggestion that (at least as far as underived syllogistic forms are concerned) the axiom on which the validity of a syllogism S depends is not itself a premise of S but is what we get when we take the conditional corresponding to S and generalize it. For example, from “All humans are animals; all animals are substances; therefore all humans are substances” we get “For any X, Y and Z, if every X is Y, and every Y is Z, then every X is Z”; and from ‘If it is day, it is light; it is day; therefore it is light’ we get ‘For any P and Q, if (if P, then Q) and P, then Q’.

All ancient logicians believed that syllogisms constitute only a subset of valid arguments; but different logicians and different schools drew different distinctions between the two sets. Chapter 6 discusses at length Alexander’s and Galen’s logical utilitarianism, according to which an argument is a syllogism if and only if its logical form is suitable for scientific proofs. One particular application of this general stance that Barnes takes into account (487–517) is the rejection—already implied by Aristotle’s own definition of syllogism—of Stoic circular arguments, in which the conclusion is identical with one of the premises. Another case (463–87) is Galen’s lack of interest in modal logic, which Barnes explains as due to a correct appreciation of the fact that modal logic is useless for scientific proof, despite what Aristotle seems to suggest. It is useless for proof because, although the propositions of Aristotelian science do have a modal status (those of some sciences are necessarily true, those of others only possibly so), they are not modalized, namely do not carry the modal operator ‘Necessarily’ or ‘Possibly’. Another and final case (518–26) is Galen’s view that arguments based on negated conjunctions, like the third Stoic unproved (‘Not both P and Q; but P; therefore not-Q’), are useless for proof. Barnes acutely supposes that Galen’s point is that either the negated conjunction actually means that P and Q are in conflict, and hence is equivalent to ‘If P, then not-Q’, or we cannot use such an argument to prove its conclusion because then we can establish its complex premise only by first establishing its conclusion. Consider: “Locke wasn’t both a philosopher and an historian; Locke was a philosopher; therefore Locke wasn’t an historian.”

This review gives only an idea of the book’s riches. One general feature is especially remarkable. In discussing a particular issue Barnes usually takes all the time that it takes to unfold patiently various possible lines of interpretation one after another, bringing out all their implications before deciding which to adopt, if any (he does not fear agnosticism). This may sometimes prove a bit tiring; but it is more often illuminating. It is as if we were allowed to watch a great scholar’s
thought in the making—and in quest for nothing less than the truth about its subject.1

1. The volume contains a certain number of misprints. For example, the argument’s letters at 227 are mistaken; at 329 for “X ⊃ Y; X: Z” read either “X ⊃ Y; X: Y” or “X ⊃ Z; X: Z”; at 376 for “from Celarent to Cesare” read “for Celarent from Cesare”; at 407 for “but that . . . therefore this” read “but this . . . therefore that.”

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Beginning in 1643, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia corresponded with Descartes about mind-body interaction, the compatibility of human free will and divine providence, and the moral psychology of regret—among other topics. These letters are included in the standard edition of Descartes’s work.1 Portions have been translated into English, and selected letters have been reprinted in a collection of excerpts from the writings of early modern women philosophers.2 But for all this, Lisa Shapiro’s edition is the first English translation of the complete, extant Princess Elisabeth-Descartes correspondence.

One might wonder why this is so, especially since the correspondence contains Descartes’s most detailed responses to questions about mind-body


2. Anthony Kenny and Robert Stoothoff, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. 3, ed. and trans. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), provide translations only of selected letters from Descartes’s side of the correspondence. English translations of selected letters from both sides of the exchange can be found in John Blom, Descartes: His Moral Philosophy and Psychology (New York: New York University Press, 1978) and Andrea Nye, The Princess and the Philosopher: Letters of Elisabeth of the Palatine to René Descartes (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). However, since Nye’s book does not aim to be a scholarly treatment, all comparisons of Shapiro’s translations will be to those of either Kenny and Stoothoff or Blom. Blom’s translations of several letters in the correspondence have been included in Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period, ed. Margaret Atherton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).
interaction and the bulk of Descartes’s scant remarks about morals and politics. It is also curious that the complete Elisabeth side of the correspondence has not appeared in English until now, given increasing interest in reconstructing early modern women’s own philosophical views and not simply their criticisms of the male figures’ views. However, the status of the manuscript letters, their provenance, and their dating have constituted significant editorial hurdles. And Elisabeth’s status as a genuine philosopher has come in for question in the literature.

The first job an editor of a correspondence must attend to is the examination of the original letters or copies of the letters. But, until now, access to copies of the letters has not been possible for many twentieth-century editors. In brief, the history is this: Elisabeth’s side of the correspondence was never published in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. There appears to have been no trace of the letters until Alexander Foucher de Careil identified documents, found in Rosendael Castle near Arnhem, as the Elisabeth letters; he published them in 1879. But at some point, between 1935 and the castle’s renovation in 1985–90, the letters went missing again. Theo Verbeek and his colleagues have recently located them at long last, only to find that the recovered letters are not seventeenth-century originals or copies, but eighteenth-century copies. Whether there is an extant seventeenth-century copy remains unknown. Shapiro’s volume gives the details of the provenance of the manuscript letters and becomes a landmark edition in that it is the first English translation of the correspondence to be based on an examination of what is presumably the closest thing we have to the original Elisabeth letters: the eighteenth-century copies first published by Foucher de Careil.

An editor of these letters must also face problems concerning the dating of the letters. Shapiro follows the dating in the Arnhem manuscript when Adam and Tannery have provided no good reason to choose the Julian over the Gregorian calendar year dating, or vice versa. Blom’s edition typically, however, blindly follows Adam and Tannery and yet fails to follow them in revising the alleged July 1647 letter to July 1644. In contrast, Shapiro’s dating of the letters is careful and consistent.

Further, an editor must also respond to the criticism that while the correspondence may be of philosophical interest for the light it sheds on Descartes’s

4. After Descartes’s death, Elisabeth had her letters to him returned to her and she refused to grant permission to publish them. Her intention was to have the letters destroyed.
5. Alexandre Foucher de Careil, *Descartes, la Princesse Elisabeth et la Reine Christine* (Paris/Amsterdam: Germer-Bailliére/Muller, 1879).
views, it fails to present us with a female philosopher in her own right—a woman with systematic, original, philosophical views of her own, who would have been perceived as a philosopher by her contemporaries.7 With respect to Elisabeth’s own philosophical views, Shapiro’s main interpretive contribution is her suggestion that Elisabeth’s commitment to mechanical explanation “leads her to try to develop an account of mind—that of human capacity for reason and reflection—that is materialist, thereby allowing for an efficient causal explanation of the way our thoughts and bodily states move one another” (40). Of course, one can be a mechanist without endorsing a materialist account of the mind; consider Descartes’s dualistic position, according to which mechanism accounts only for purely bodily change but not purely mental or mind-body activity. But Shapiro thinks it is Elisabeth’s demand that “one theoretical framework be able to explain the whole of nature” that drives her attempt to produce a materialist account of mind (40). Elisabeth is only interested in exploring a materialist theory of mind that does not reduce thought to bodily motions. Thus, she would reject a Hobbesian account of mind. Shapiro reads her argument as a typical seventeenth-century argument from conceivability: while extension is not necessary for pure thought, it is nonetheless not inconsistent with thought; it is conceivable that extension is suited to another essential function of the mind. Elisabeth concludes from this that, contra Descartes, it is possible that mind/thought is not “an entity capable of subsisting in itself, suspended separate from body” (44).

This interpretation may be correct. However, as even Shapiro admits, it is a somewhat speculative reading of the extant letters, which come to a puzzling halt on the topic of mind-body interaction in mid-discussion. Perhaps there are missing letters that clarify Elisabeth’s decided views. But given the extant letters, it is not obvious to me that she is committed to developing a materialist account of mind. She does say: “I admit it would be easier for me to concede matter and extension to the soul than to concede the capacity to move a body and to be moved by it to an immaterial thing” (68), but goes on to say: “I entertain these sentiments only as friends which I do not intend to keep, assuring myself that you will explicate the nature of an immaterial substance and the manner of its actions and passion in the body” (68). Perhaps Elisabeth is just demanding that Descartes justify his rejection of this possibility, in light of her specific challenges to Descartes’s dualistic interactionism.

To be sure, in her later letter of July 1, 1643, Elisabeth claims that Descartes has not yet said enough about mind-body interaction to justify her

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in giving up “her friends.” She also says: “Though extension is not necessary to thought, neither is it at all repugnant to it” (42), thus rejecting (or possibly showing she does not understand) Descartes’s epistemic argument for mind-body distinctness. But rather than ending the letter on this note, she writes: “I will lose all hope of finding certitude in anything in the world if you, who alone have kept me from being a skeptic, do not answer that to which my first reasoning carried me” (72). It is possible that, absent a satisfactory response from Descartes, Elisabeth would not have retained a materialist account of mind and would have abandoned this “friend”—remaining a skeptic about this matter, in accordance with the method of doubt about things not clearly and distinctly perceived.

Shapiro does as fine a job as Anthony Kenny and Robert Stoothoff in providing us with a philosophically accurate and stylishly elegant English version of Descartes’s side of the correspondence. Moreover her translation of the Elisabeth side of the correspondence clearly surpasses Blom’s stylistically. In crucial places it is also philosophically more accurate and consistent. For example, Descartes typically uses the verb *connaître* [to be acquainted with] to express the way the understanding and imagination only obscurely grasp mind-body union, while the senses distinctly grasp it. Perhaps Descartes is attempting to distinguish between the way his senses know things by acquaintance from the way his understanding knows things by having applied the method of doubt; in the latter case he typically uses the verb *savoir*. Shapiro chooses not to impose this interpretation on the text and uniformly translates *connaître* and *savoir* as ‘to know’. This may be wise since on occasion Descartes does use *savoir* to express knowledge of mind-body union. Blom, on the other hand, translates *connaître* sometimes as ‘to know’ and other times as ‘to recognize’, without explaining the philosophical interpretation guiding his translation choices.

Philosophically, the most important difference between Blom’s translation and Shapiro’s is the way they translate a crucial line in Elisabeth’s letter of July 1, 1643. This line is the linchpin of Shapiro’s thesis that Elisabeth is trying to construct a materialist account of mind. Here is the original: *elle pourra duire a quelque autre fonction de l’ame, qui neluy est moins essentielle.* Blom’s translation is: “it [extension] will be able to belong to some other function of the soul less essential to her.” Shapiro’s is: “it [extension] could be suited to some other function of the soul which is no less essential to it.” In terms of seventeenth-century French grammar, I do not see what would justify Blom in thinking that this is an example of a nonnegative use of ‘*ne*’. Possibly, Blom assumed that Elisabeth wants to preserve a major facet of Descartes’s philosophy of mind, namely, that intellectual thought alone is essential to mind. On this reading,

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8. See reference in footnote 2 above.
9. Descartes says the primitive notion of mind-body union is the notion that “each always experiences within himself without philosophizing, in knowing [à *savoir*] that he is a single person who has together a body and a thought, which are of such a nature that this thought can move the body and sense what happens to it” (69).
Elisabeth holds that while intellectual thought is the principal attribute of mind, constituting mind’s essence, there may be other functions of the mind that are “less essential to her,” such as the things the mind can do insofar as it is united to body: have sensations or move its own body. So, while extension is not part of the mind’s essence, it may be a property the mind needs in order to carry out its nonessential functions. However, saying that sensation and voluntary motion are “less essential” to the mind is philosophically awkward—surely they are either essential to the mind or not. Shapiro’s translation seems more likely, but it attributes to Elisabeth the sort of bold break from Descartes’s philosophy of mind that Arnauld had considered: contra Descartes’s real distinction argument, it seems possible that extension is part of the mind’s essence since extension is not conceptually inconsistent with thought. While above I gave reason to be cautious of taking this to be Elisabeth’s considered view, it is nevertheless a philosophically interesting interpretation and one that gains some support from Elisabeth’s remark here.

Shapiro has given us a philosophically careful and stylistically refined translation, together with a historically rich introduction and annotations, a useful bibliography, and a reading of Elisabeth as committed to a materialist theory of mind. All of this makes her edition of the Elisabeth-Descartes letters—which also includes Elisabeth’s correspondence with the Quakers Robert Barclay and William Penn, as well as Edward Reynold’s dedication to Elisabeth of his *Treatise on the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*—important reading for scholars with an interest in Descartes or seventeenth-century women’s contributions to philosophy, as well as for students of early modern philosophy more generally.

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There is perhaps no philosophical issue with which Hegel is more identified—and over which he has been more vilified—than his notion of contradiction. Hegel famously insists in his criticism of Kant’s antinomies that opposition “exists in every actual thing,” but what this claim means is hardly a matter about which Hegel’s readers (either sympathizers or detractors) have ever been in
agreement. There are widely differing views in the scholarly literature about whether Hegel should be understood, for example, to affirm or deny the law of noncontradiction, and Hegel’s own more notorious comments in this context—his appeals to the importance of Heraclitus, for example—are often brought up as a way of ending a thorny discussion rather than as a point of departure for further philosophical investigation.

A new book on Hegel’s notion of contradiction in general is therefore something that is most welcome, and Susan Hahn’s book is particularly welcome for the way in which it explores contradiction as a sort of root issue behind Hegel’s concrete approaches to the diverse topics of nature, ethics, and aesthetics. In exploring these issues, Hahn helpfully brings to light several important concerns worthy of more philosophical attention at the moment: the connection between Goethe’s organic approach to nature and Hegel’s, the ties between the organic unity underneath Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and Hegel’s aesthetics, and the ethical importance of actively engaging contradiction in the form of value conflicts.

Hahn’s general position on contradiction seems to be that Hegel neither denies nor affirms the law of noncontradiction but rather addresses in his system two kinds of contradiction (one “formal” and presumably to be avoided and one “organic” that is the source of potential philosophical richness). She argues that the ultimate account to be given of Hegel’s stance must reflect the ways in which the more organic form of contradiction is in evidence in his philosophies of nature, art, and ethics. In this light, she stresses interestingly that Hegel’s position—not unlike that of an ancient Pyrrhonist—might best be regarded by not merely examining the official claims he makes about contradiction but also considering the implicit philosophical use he makes of it in practice (a point that ratifies the stress Aristotle placed on practice in his initial formulation of the law itself).

In her turn to Hegel’s actual practice, Hahn offers a suggestive account of the importance for Hegel of Goethe’s organicism—an endeavor at once holistic and empirical in its aspiration. These sections of the book, addressing Goethe’s theory of plants and attention to what is “living” in nature, are genuine contributions to the literature since Goethe’s influence on Hegel is (aside from the important ongoing work of Eckart Förster and others) still unfortunately relatively underexplored in contemporary English language work on German idealism.

Hahn takes as her aim what she terms a “naturalized” reading of Hegel’s philosophical enterprise, and it is the exposition of this claim that she might be encouraged to develop further. While Hegel’s logic on her naturalized reading would still appear to have systematic priority over the more concrete philosophy of nature, she does nonetheless make a number of claims that suggest the reverse order (Hegel “seeks to derive the principle of determinate negation directly from nature,” as she puts it in chapter 3). A related difficulty that might
be addressed in further work is what understanding of the relation of nature and spirit should follow from the naturalistic and organic approach to Hegel that Hahn is suggesting. Hegel does after all insist, in an apparently nonreductive manner, on spirit’s key explanatory role in the system, particularly in such well-known claims as the remark that stands at the beginning of his *Philosophy of Spirit* that “Spirits is the truth of nature.”

A similar concern can be raised about her claims for the role of nature and contradiction in the other two central issues her book takes up: Hegelian aesthetics and ethics. Hahn’s account of the similarities between Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and Hegel’s treatment of natural beauty (das Naturschöne) in his lectures on *Aesthetics* offers an important corrective to some contemporary views of the distance between Kantian and Hegelian aesthetic projects. Yet, while Hegel clearly insists in the introduction of the *Aesthetics* that Kant’s third critique provided “the starting point for the true comprehension of the beauty of art,” he nonetheless argues that it is “only by overcoming Kant’s deficiencies” that we could arrive at the position of the “true” concept of beautiful art. (Hegel thus goes on to say that Schiller’s notion of beauty as “freedom in appearance” and Schelling’s concept of the philosophy of art are essential moments in the development of his own position that run beyond a merely interpretive appropriation of Kantian aesthetics—both moments that it might have been interesting to see developed in connection with Hahn’s argument.)

The book’s treatment of ethics rightly takes up the importance of the role of value conflict as well as what she calls the “essentially retrospective” nature of ethical action and judgment in Hegel’s ethics. The final chapter argues that, despite his criticism of Romantic views of conscience, Hegel nonetheless needs to employ a positive notion of conscience to capture the holistic goals of his ethics on which intention and result, particular purpose and universal claim are not merely isolated moments. Hahn’s account of Hegel’s holistic notion of conscience and practical rationality reflects the vitally oppositional and often tragic sense of agency that lies behind Hegel’s mature ethical and social philosophy; her final chapter suggests, as has some other recent work, that there are certain negative reactive attitudes toward contradiction, such as guilt and regret, that must be seen to play a central role if something like Hegel’s story of value revision is to work. Hahn’s book ends with an image that it is clear Hegel brooded about from his earliest reading of Greek classics until his late lectures on aesthetics: the image of the blind but deeply reflective Oedipus of the second Sophoclean play, coming retrospectively to terms with the contradictions that had emerged from an action that he had not intended but for which he took some form of responsibility. Hahn appeals to this image to suggest ways in which a contemporary reading of the late Oedipus might yoke together elements that stem both from ancient (causal) as well as modern (Kantian, Fichtean) notions of agency. Given the richness of that suggestion, it would be interesting to see
Hahn develop somewhat further how the more historically inflected and socially mediated elements of Hegelian agency are to be related to the intuitive and organic side of the account that her current book has stressed.

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