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THE CHALLENGES FOR EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY: EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION[1]

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1. Introduction to the Current Volume

In the volume at hand, I have the honour of appearing together with scholars whose work I deeply admire and who have all in their own way contributed to our present understanding of Early Modern Philosophy.[2] In this volume of *Philosophica* Peter Machamer, James E. McGuire and Justin Smytsma have joined forces to write a paper on Descartes's mature notion of material causation. The topic of causation in Early Modern Philosophy is still in need of scholarly scrutiny (for good starting points, see Loeb, 1981 and Clatterbaugh, 1999). Eric Schliesser, Catherine Wilson, and George S. Pappas each made an individual contribution. Schliesser re-evaluates Berkeley's lessons from Newton. Wilson takes up Descartes's *Sixth Meditation* and provides new interpretative perspectives on it. Pappas explores Berkeley's criticism of Locke's epistemology. I will discuss each paper in more detail in section 3.

Allow me to say something more about these scholars and more specifically how, I think, they contributed to our current understanding of Early Modern Philosophy. I value and admire Machamer's equal interest in topics from both the philosophy of science (mainly causation and

[1] I am indebted to Dagmar Provijn for his benevolence, Erik Weber for his assistance in editing this volume and to Roger Ariew for his wise advice.

[2] In this volume "early modern" philosophy refers to philosophy during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

mechanical explanations) and the history of science (e.g., Galileo, Descartes). McGuire's work on Newton's metaphysics was one of the first books that introduced me to Newtonian scholarship. His work guided me – and continues to do so – in my attempt to come to grips with Newton's natural philosophy. In this respect, his *Tradition and Innovation* (McGuire, 1995) has been a true and ongoing source of inspiration and reflection. Pappas's work made me appreciative of the diversity of philosophies commonly placed under the – big! – umbrella of "empiricism" (Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Reid). Schliesser introduced me and taught me to appreciate the work of Huygens – which has, to both our frustration, not reached the same level of attention as Newton's – and, more importantly, raised my awareness of the great need of historians of philosophy to understand Newton's impact on philosophical inquiry. His work testifies of the fruitful interaction between the history of science, the philosophy of science and the history of philosophy. Catherine Wilson's now classic *The Invisible World* (Wilson, 1995), in which she explores the impact of the invention of the microscope on philosophical debates in the modern area, has been an *exemplum* to me of careful historical research with a strong focus on the interrelation between early modern science and philosophy.

Enough for the *laudatio*, let me clarify the reasons why a volume on Early Modern Philosophy is still relevant today. I believe that our current understanding of Early Modern Philosophy needs to address at least three types of problems (see 2). The works of the contributing scholars can be understood as attempts to resolve one (or more) of these sub-problems. As much as our understanding of Early Modern Philosophy has progressed over the last decades, I have no doubt that our current understanding will continue to improve likewise. The work and orientation of the aforementioned scholars will no doubt have contributed substantially to this evolution.

2. Three Challenges

Coming to grips with the evolution of Early Modern Philosophy will consist in addressing the following three issues:

Understanding the Interaction with "Science"

In the seventeenth century the distinction between philosophy and "science" was not as strict as we currently perceive the matter. Both were closely intertwined, and one might even want to argue, inseparable. This has its implications for the methodology suited for approaching modern philosophy: scholars need to respect this still unified field of "natural philosophy". *Our* differentiation was not present in the work of the protagonists of Early Modern Philosophy, hence we should respect this undifferentiated domain and treat it as a unified whole.

During the seventeenth-century, "scientific" endeavours were inseparable from "philosophical" ones. A seventeenth-century philosopher was essentially a *natural philosopher*. We need to gain understanding of, for instance, how natural philosophers used "scientific" knowledge to legitimize their "philosophical" projects, how they tried to "philosophically" justify the adequacy of their "scientific" method, how they reflected upon its consequences for philosophical inquiry, etc. In brief, we need to study the close interaction between both disciplines. Especially, during the eighteenth century philosophers reflected upon the question *how* we are able to attain (certain?) knowledge of the world – *that* we are able to establish such knowledge about the natural world was demonstrated in the preceding century by the success of the Scientific Revolution.

Exercises on Adequate Ascriptions of Contemporary Concepts

Much historical research on Early Modern Philosophy concerns the question whether the historians' categories adequately captures the natural philosophy of these *virtuosi*. For instance, take the categories: "empiricist" and "rationalist(ic)". Our current understanding has shown that describing Early Modern Philosophy in terms of these dichotomous terms is too simplistic and utterly misguiding. Therefore, we should be very careful in our usage of such labels.

Put positively, this means that we should try to describe and analyse modern philosophy with adequate concepts. Part of our analysis of Early Modern Philosophy should correspondingly consist of deciding which concepts are valuable concepts, i.e. concepts that reflect the categorizations of past natural philosophers. The *rôle* of these concepts is twofold: *descriptive* (they should reflect history "in its own terms") and

analytic (they should be explanatory relevant to us as philosophers and historians).

Giving Full Credit to the Complexity and Diversity of Early Modern Philosophy
The third challenge is closely connected to the previous goal: we should give full credit to the complexity and diversity of Early Modern philosophy. This will at least involve two different areas where this complexity and diversity will enter the scene. First of all, we should study the overall natural philosophy of individual philosophers; secondly, we should study the different movements in natural philosophy in sufficient detail. In other words, we should also have our eyes on processes in the *longue durée*. Of course, this is an arduous task, but I see no principal reason why it could not be done.

3. The Contributed Papers

A balanced understanding of Early Modern Philosophy will surely need to incorporate answers to the questions mentioned in the previous section. I will now discuss the papers of the contributing authors and show how they help to realize this agenda.

Peter Machamer, James E. McGuire and Justin Sytsma
In their joint contribution, the authors re-open the crucial topic of Descartes's notion of physical causation. They discuss how Descartes arrived at his mature view of material causation and point to the extent to which Descartes's account of intra-worldly causation abandons his earlier and more traditional views about material causation. This essay is obviously related to the first and the third issue I have raised.

Eric Schliesser
Schliesser's paper tries to analyse – by focussing on the indispensability argument of matter – Berkeley's complex philosophical response to Newtonian science. Berkeley's instrumentalist reinterpretation of Newton's achievements, wherein the role of "science" is limited to predictions alone, is essentially an attempt to show that "philosophy" has its own authority (and hence, that science does not have authority over

philosophy). Schliesser further shows that the ascription of the differentiation between philosophy and science is not anachronistic in Berkeley's case. Obviously, this accords very well with the first and the second issue.

Catherine Wilson
In her article *Interpreting Descartes's Meditation Six*, Catherine Wilson offers a new and provocative reading of Descartes's sixth meditation. She argues that Descartes considered his theory of the body as an innervated machine – in which the soul was situated – to be his most original contribution to philosophy. Descartes showed how the body suffered – like any machine – from certain features of the corporeal world, namely the human passions. This insight allowed Descartes to argue that ethics involves no more than a proper knowledge of the sources of disturbance of the human soul and the avoidance of them. This thesis points to the close intertwinement of physiology, metaphysics and ethics in Descartes's work. This essay deals with the first and the second issue.

George S. Pappas
In his article *Berkeley's Assessment of Locke's Epistemology*, George S. Pappas analyses Berkeley's conformity and inference argument against Locke's theory of perception. Both arguments are not as decisive as traditionally has been perceived and fail to engage in Locke's actual position. The main reason for this is that Berkeley does not see that Locke's position is compatible with the non-inferential nature of perceptual knowledge. In his analysis, Pappas uses Chisholm's theory of perception. Evidently, this paper involves the third issue. But it also – by relating his analyses to modern theories of perception – includes an analysis of which contemporary concept is adequate to describe Locke's position. Therefore, it also relates to the second issue.

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In my own paper, *Bacon's Idea of Induction meets Newton's Practice of it*, I try to argue that Newton, to a large extent, practiced Bacon's idea of methodized induction. This involves an approach which focuses on the more abstract level of inferential strategies occurring in Newton's natural

philosophy (and hence, not solely on the explicit utterances made by him). This project is related to the first and the third issue.

I hope that, by the end of this issue of *Philosophica* dedicated to Early Modern Philosophy, the reader will have gained much by reading these state-of-the-art essays.

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