

finds his theoretical grounding for these Enlightenment questions in twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy of mind. He focuses on two competing theories of consciousness: emergence (consciousness, although absent from individual particles of matter, arises from systems of atoms) and panpsychism (each atom is in some way conscious). Before exploring Rochester's own views on atomism, chapter 2 explores how earlier versions of the emergent and panpsychist models coexist in Thomas Creech's 1682 translation of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*.

The question of how a person moves herself (or, for that matter, her little finger) has plagued mankind since the beginning of plugging questions. In the *Physics*, for example, Aristotle divided the universe into two categories: things that can be moved (a bed, a garment) and things that have the power of self-motion. I would have liked to see *Actions and Objects* explore in greater detail the classical origins—before and after Lucretius—of Enlightenment philosophy of action. And yet, with such breadth of philosophical material already in play, Kramnick was probably wise to concentrate on British writing between 1650 and 1750. As it stands, Kramnick's excellent study points to future avenues for research into how eighteenth-century writers—many of whom did not distinguish between “philosophical” and “literary” texts—attempted to reconcile ancient and modern theories about volition and causality.

Sara Landreth, an assistant professor of English at the University of Ottawa, is writing a book about how eighteenth-century writers turned to Aristotelian, Hobbesian, and Newtonian models of motion to explain all kinds of change, from a chemical reaction to a poem's influence on a reader's passions.

Christian Thorne. *The Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. xii+377pp. US\$49.95. ISBN 978-0-674-03522-5.

This lengthy book is a reconstruction and analysis of selected “anti-foundational” texts and ideas from antiquity and early modernity. Its basic aim is to demonstrate that a long tradition of Pyrrhonian scepticism, which began in ancient Greece and was revived in sixteenth-century Europe, is actually politically reactionary in both its intentions and its effects, despite sharing many formal similarities and argumentative strategies with contemporary “Left anti-foundationalism.” Thorne's general conclusion is that the critique of knowledge that lies at the heart of such scepticism can be stylistically innovative and radical without necessarily being socially or politically subversive. The moral of his story is that, although recent anti-foundational intellectual movements

such as critical theory, poststructuralism, and neopragmatism are almost uniformly radical or “progressive” in their politics, their sceptical antecedents in the early modern period were anything but. Hence Thorne’s conclusion that scepticism “simply *is a form*—the form of antimony or argument/counterargument. Scepticism aims to be *nothing but that form*, without any philosophical insides” (314).

Pyrrhonian scepticism, named after the ancient Greek philosopher Pyrrho and closely associated with his follower Sextus Empiricus, is the view that we ought to suspend judgment about what to believe because we cannot know what is true and what is false. This cognitive “suspension” (Greek *epokhē*, ἐποχή) does not deny the possibility of knowledge, since such a denial would itself be a claim to knowledge. Rather, it favours the wholesale abandonment of the quest for understanding itself, which is held to be intellectually honest and mentally liberating. An influential Latin translation of Sextus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* was published in 1569, and played an important part in the revival of Pyrrhonist scepticism in early modern Europe. A typical example of this can be seen in Michel de Montaigne’s influential and endearing *Essais* (1580), to which Thorne devotes two long, critical chapters of his book.

According to Thorne, a generalized scepticism about knowledge pulls the epistemological rug out from under *all* beliefs, including those that would serve as a basis for criticizing the status quo, leaving would-be reformers and radicals with no rational answer to the question “why change?” In the context of sixteenth-century France, Montaigne’s Pyrrhonian doubt about knowledge became “an ideological weapon of the absolutist state” (85–86). By subverting the French Catholic State’s subverters, Pyrrhonism amounted to a “skeptical absolutism” (101) and “authoritarian pragmatism” (61) that in practice propped up the conservative status quo, which was the substantive political purpose of Montaigne’s formally innovative *Essais*.

Also, if, as anti-foundationalists claim, all beliefs are contingent and contextual, with no universal or objective basis, then our adherence to the particular beliefs that we happen to hold is purely a matter of socialization and habituation, in which case you should not “waste your time hammering out sophisticated arguments or passing ungainly legislation. Control memory. Condition loyalties. Police the imagination. Train the children” (84). For sceptics, epistemological disagreement is rationally irresolvable, forever threatening to spill over into the political and religious spheres with catastrophic results, as it did in sixteenth-century France and seventeenth-century England. This threat led Montaigne to seek unity, “not philosophical unity, but rather some site of local homogeneity from which variety can be expelled. This is a scepticism of the loyalty oath and the witch-hunt” (107).

The superficially moderate and sceptical Montaigne emerges here as a close ideological relative of the political absolutist Thomas Hobbes, who also viewed philosophy as inimical to political order and sought to isolate the state from knowledge and argument “so that sovereignty can operate unimpeded” (208). Early eighteenth-century Tory satirists such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Daniel Defoe continued this sceptical assault on philosophy and knowledge (the Counter-Enlightenment of the book’s title), and for much the same reason: “it necessarily leads to social and political disorder” (250). They entered the new public sphere of print culture in order to subvert it. In other chapters, Thorne traces the thread of similar sceptical assumptions in early modern theatre, novels, and Utopian literature.

Thorne’s basic point about the political emptiness of epistemological scepticism is well taken, if not new, and his case is persuasively argued. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas made much the same point about Michel Foucault when he described him as a “young conservative.” If philosophy cannot lead us to knowledge about truth and justice, then we have just as much (or rather, just as little) reason to tear down the status quo as we have to prop it up. So while Thorne is right that epistemological scepticism is consistent with political conservatism, as he convincingly shows in the case of early modern Pyrrhonists like Montaigne, it is equally true that it is consistent with *all* political contents, including radicalism. This point is welcome and apposite in our time when virtually all anti-foundationalists happen to be politically on the left, which can easily lead one to the mistaken conclusion that they necessarily go together. It is a point that could have been made in far fewer than 400 pages, and without a long excursus on the science fiction novels *Solaris* and *Total Eclipse*. For all Thorne’s scepticism about the great French sceptic, his own thoughtful, dense, and occasionally self-indulgent book bears the mark of Montaigne’s own style, although perhaps without quite as much charm.

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