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A Critical Introduction to Skepticism by Allan Hazlett

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Griffiths, Paul, and Karola Stotz, *Genetics and Philosophy: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 270, £50 (hardback).

In this book, Paul Griffiths and Karola Stotz deal with the classic issues addressed by the philosophy of biology: from the topic of reductionism to the metaphysical assumptions implied by the laws of nature or the issues regarding the use of certain biological organisms as models, from the analysis of the theories of reference to the field of developmental biology. The book specifically addresses the particular type of information reductionism employed in some fields of genetics and molecular biology.

The book is undoubtedly aimed at exploring the philosophy of science, despite the fact that many of the issues relating to the philosophy of physics and mathematics—main reference points in the current philosophical debate—are explicitly split off from the biological issues and are often consciously overlooked, as in the case of the genetics of populations.

The arguments and the structure of the book's nine chapters rely on the idea that, in the current philosophy of biology, there is a remarkable tension between a reductionist point of view and an approach that could be defined as 'pluralist'. According to the reductionist approach, the activities of genes play a primary role at both an ontological and an explanatory level: not only are genes seen as the fundamental units for selection and reproduction; they represent also the key factors in explaining the form and development of living creatures. On the other hand, the pluralist approach emphasizes the equal influence played on an explanatory and ontological level by factors other than genes, such as other organisms and the surrounding environment.

The two authors provide a thorough and comprehensive review of the concept of the gene, showing how over the years this concept has been linked to a series of causing conditions and—with the development of molecular biology—to a series of specific structures. The book discusses these topics in an exemplary and comprehensive way, especially when the authors address theories particularly close to their hearts, such as the anti-reductionist, pluralist, and structuralist theories (cf. chapter 3, 'The material gene').

Going beyond the book's core issue, the authors provide a good number of in-depth analyses on a wide range of topics, presenting them in a way that requires no specialist philosophical or biological knowledge. For this reason, the book is suited also for people without specialist knowledge, even if sometimes a reader might usefully refer to a biology or chemistry dictionary in order to understand the full meaning of some technical vocabulary. Finally, the book's long list of bibliographic references allows readers to further deepen the information provided in every single chapter.

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Hazlett, Allan, *A Critical Introduction to Skepticism*, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. x + 212, US\$49.99 (paperback).

This opinionated introduction was missing from the philosophical library. It is useful to students and it poses some challenges to the experts as well. Hazlett maps out the main sceptical and anti-sceptical positions, scrutinizing key arguments by means of a generous selection of quotes.

Part One covers the basics. In Chapter 1, besides a succinct historical overview (split between the first and the last sections), Hazlett outlines Ancient sceptical arguments (the so-called ten modes and five modes) and he arranges the varieties of scepticism according to four variables: the ‘order’ (first- or second-) of the sceptical belief; the ‘scope’ of scepticism (all propositions or a targeted selection?); Academic versus Pyrrhonian scepticism; and the ‘modal force’ of the sceptical persuasion. Three chief objections are then considered, according to which scepticism is self-refuting, incompatible with action, or (in its Pyrrhonian variant) cannot be formulated. Chapter 2 inspects the so-called mode from dispute, based on disagreement. Chapter 3 analyzes the sceptical doubts raised by Hume about inductive reasoning, whose ancestral versions can be traced back to Agrippa’s trilemma (employing three of the five modes). Chapter 4 presents the Cartesian hypothesis of there being a demon manipulating our thoughts. Disagreement and induction receive little attention for the rest of the volume; for those topics, the bibliographical suggestions at the end of each chapter are especially handy to the less experienced reader.

Part Two details three contemporary responses to Cartesian scepticism, all of them considered wanting by Hazlett. In Chapter 5, after presenting G.E. Moore’s reaction to Descartes’s doubts, Hazlett probes neo-Mooreanism, according to which I know that I am not deceived by a demon. Chapter 6 explores the prospects of rejecting the ‘closure principle’ (i.e. if S knows that p, and the proposition that p entails the proposition that q, then S can know that q), thereby denying that all knowledge rests on knowing that the demon hypothesis is false. Chapter 7 presents a third strategy for resisting Cartesian scepticism—denying the validity of the argument based on a contextualist reading of the verb ‘to know’.

The first chapter of *Part Three*—Chapter 8—points at less explored forms of scepticism, directed respectively towards perceptual acquaintance, knowledge of intrinsic properties, and explanatory understanding. Chapter 9 ends the volume with a sympathetic plea in favour of mitigated Cartesian scepticism. Here we find the sketch of a view that will be of interest also to the most versed on the topic.

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Kremer, Elmar J., *Analysis of Existing: Barry Miller’s Approach to God*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. xiv + 143, AU\$148 (hardback).

The primary aim of this short book—which begins with a Foreword by David Burrell, C.S.C.—is to review and promote the philosophical theology of the Australian Marist priest, Barry Miller (1923–2006). Miller is best known for a trilogy of books—*From Existence to God* (1992), *A Most Unlikely God* (1996), and *The Fullness of Being* (2002)—which, among other things, defends the claims (1) that existence is a real property of concrete individuals; (2) that it is possible to prove—without any principles of causality or sufficient reason—that there is an uncaused cause of the universe; and (3) that the uncaused cause is the simple God of ‘classical theism’ (a.k.a. mainstream Catholic theology). The central chapters—‘Beginning with Existence’, ‘From Existence to God’, ‘Divine Simplicity’, and ‘Simplicity, Creation and Human Freedom’—fill out the details of Miller’s Thomistic metaphysics. These chapters are bookended with an introductory biographical sketch, and a concluding set of