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a coherent theory. Vaughan’s own theory, drawn largely from Michael Sendivogius, which emphasizes an all-pervading “spirit of life,” may be far removed from the inanimate mechanical view of Descartes (whom Vaughan assailed), but it need not deliver him into the hands of occultists.

Dickson’s work provides the historian of chemistry and of laboratory practice with a valuable primary source. It is hoped that scholars will use it both to extract Vaughan’s methodology and principles and to shed light on his published writings.

LAWRENCE M. PRINCIPE


Margaret Cavendish, the duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673), has undergone a critical and scholarly renaissance in the last twenty years. Her works’ place in the canon of natural philosophy is validated by the publication of her major philosophical treatise, Observations upon Experimental Philosophy. Eileen O’Neill’s edition of the 1668 edition of this text (the first was printed in 1666) will go a long way to making Cavendish accessible to a modern audience.

O’Neill’s edition of the Observations is textually impeccable. She has consulted numerous copies of the text, and her correlation of discrepancies and changes between the 1666 and 1668 editions of the Observations is helpful, as are her notes to the text. However, her introduction is in many ways perplexing. She locates Cavendish within the Stoic philosophical tradition without giving any real evidence for the connection apart from Cavendish’s supposed appropriation of the Stoic doctrine of the blending of matter and the Stoic concept of motion and causation. Cavendish herself never acknowledged any debt to Stoicism (although, as O’Neill points out, Cavendish prided herself on her “originality” and rarely acknowledged any debt to her ancient or modern philosophical peers), and in fact she never mentioned Stoicism in her philosophical writings at all. O’Neill makes an argument from omission: since Cavendish criticized almost every other philosophical sect, her silence on Stoicism proves her kinship with this ancient philosophy.

The fact that Cavendish inhabited the home of the deceased Peter Paul Rubens, who had been part of the neo-Stoic revival of Justus Lipsius, while in exile in Antwerp is also seen as suggestive of Cavendish’s acquaintance with a Stoical milieu, but that is not enough to define her as a Stoic. There is no world soul in the duchess of Newcastle’s philosophy, and, as O’Neill herself points out, the Stoic idea of an infinite void beyond the realm of material being is also absent from Cavendish’s work. O’Neill quite rightly intimates that Cavendish could have borrowed from, or at least been inspired by, Descartes in some of her quasi-Stoic notions.

In fact, it is probably incorrect to associate Cavendish with any one philosophical school. She lived in a diverse intellectual climate and was exposed to many ideas, but most especially to those of Hobbes, who was her husband’s client. She also could have known about Gassendi’s hylozoic atomism through her friend Walter Charleton’s paraphrase of it in The Darkness of Atheism (1652) and Physiologica-Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletoniana (1654).

Cavendish, however, was most closely influenced by her husband, William Cavendish, and by his brother, Sir Charles Cavendish, as she acknowledges in the prefaces to her many works. O’Neill shows little knowledge of Cavendish’s intellectual context during this period or of the duke’s continued patronage of learning and science after he and Cavendish returned to England with the Restoration. Observations upon Experimental Philosophy is a direct attack on the experimentalism of the Royal Society, particularly Robert Hooke’s Micrographia, and reflects an antiexperimental bias shared by both Newcastle and Hobbes. This aspect of Cavendish’s work is not mentioned in O’Neill’s introduction.

Its absence is also reflected in another curious omission in this edition, which may have been the decision of Cambridge University Press. Observations was published in the same volume as The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World, which presents a fantastical treatment of the same themes as the sober Observations. They are meant to be read as companion texts, and the parodic elements of Blazing World make clear Cavendish’s antipathies and feelings about natural philosophy while rephrasing her own views. To publish one text without the other (even though Kate Lilley’s edition of The New World, Called the Blazing World, was published by Penguin in 1992), leaves half an impression of the philosophic and imaginative richness of Margaret Cavendish, whose works should be included in the modern canon of texts for both aspects of her writing.

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