

ultimately recognized as best done from life by authors themselves or at least under their supervision. In these considerations Chassagne is attentive to interactions between and among authors, artists, engravers, and printers, and she opens up their world, an essential and too often unheralded dimension of the production of knowledge in the eighteenth century.

The second half of the book highlights forty-seven different books and manuscripts, across a wide range of scientific disciplines, taken from the academy's collections. These include publications of the academy itself, those of other French and European learned societies, translations, and works sent to the academy by its correspondents or others seeking to ingratiate themselves. In three or four pages each, using published and archival sources, Chassagne describes authors, the work in question, its illustrations, the scientific background to the text, and what is known of its reception within the academy. Why she chose these texts and not others is not explained, and what one is ultimately to make of this self-styled "miscellany" is not clear. Yet the vignettes will be useful to historians wanting to learn more about the texts in question, and, more than that, they present a marvelous *tour d'horizon* of eighteenth-century science as it was likely experienced by contemporaries who saw one book appear after another, without foreknowledge of the place we assign them in the history of science.

Particularly for its focus on illustrations and images, this book is a welcome addition to the library shelf set aside for the Académie Royale des Sciences, and the issues it raises should stimulate yet further work and research.

JAMES E. MCCLELLAN III

Desmond M. Clarke. *Descartes: A Biography.* xi + 507 pp., apps., figs., bibl., index. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. \$40 (cloth).

Richard Watson. *Cogito, Ergo Sum: The Life of René Descartes.* viii + 375 pp., figs., bibl., index. Boston: David R. Godine, 2002. \$35 (cloth).

Descartes has been well served by biographers. In the past sixteen years, besides these volumes offered by Desmond Clarke and Richard Watson, William R. Shea produced a scientific biography (*The Magic of Numbers and Motion: The Scientific Career of René Descartes* [Science History Publications, 1991]), Stephen Gaukroger an intellectual biography (*Descartes:*

An Intellectual Biography [Clarendon, 1995]), and Geneviève Rodis-Lewis a general biography (*Descartes: His Life and Thought*, trans. Jane Marie Todd [Cornell, 1995]). Watson, in carving out a space for his efforts, classifies previous biographies into a "French Catholic apologetic" (p. 22) tradition (Rodis-Lewis) and a "scientific apologetic" (p. 23) tradition (Gaukroger; Shea fits here as well). He would surely place Clarke in the religious apologetic tradition. He describes his own work as a "skeptical" biography, because he explodes various myths about Descartes, such as that he penned a ballet for Queen Christina of Sweden, *La naissance de la paix* [The Birth of Peace]—a myth that goes back to Adrien Baillet's first biography of Descartes (1691). And whereas Rodis-Lewis and Clarke seem intent on preserving Descartes's Catholicism in good faith, Watson treats Descartes as "cosmopolitan and pragmatist" (p. 150) about his religion and emphasizes his good relations with and sympathy for Protestants (pp. 59–61).

Cogito, Ergo Sum: The Life of René Descartes is a general biography that pays about equal attention to Descartes the philosopher and Descartes the scientist and gives greatest attention to Descartes the man. Some of Watson's appreciation of Descartes's life is conveyed by recounting his own experiences of Poitou (the region where Descartes was born and raised), Ulm and Neuburg (where Descartes's stove-heated room of 1619 may have been), the Alpine pass of Mont-Cenis (through which Descartes traveled to Italy), and towns and cities in Holland, Friesland, and Sweden (where Descartes died). Like Rodis-Lewis and Clarke, Watson covers Descartes's whole life, paying attention to his family, speculating about where he was raised (in La Haye with his grandmother or in Châtellerauld with his great uncle), discussing the suggestion that his relationship with Isaac Beeckman was homoerotic, and doubting that he was secretly married to the Dutch Protestant Helena, the mother of his daughter, Francine. He tracks settings and events as they interact with Descartes's projects and pursuits: his early travels, his later frequent moves within the United Provinces (primarily the provinces of Holland and Utrecht), his trips to France, encounters and disputes with other intellectuals, anatomical observations and vivisections, efforts to ascertain the Catholic orthodoxy of his metaphysics, the birth and death of his daughter, quarrels with his brother over managing his inheritance from their father, trouble from Calvinist theologians, relations to Princess Elisabeth and Queen Christina, and the composition and publication of his ma-

for works. The close descriptions of these episodes, based on published sources and Watson's trips to local libraries, archives, and residences, are interspersed with Watson's often entertaining commentary on the state of Descartes scholarship and the question of how to make sense of this man. The central biographical chapters are bracketed by Watson's own philosophical appreciation of Descartes's scientific and philosophical achievements, including the ways in which Descartes's thought continues to shape debates about the place of the mind in nature. In these philosophical discussions, Watson reveals his respect for the Cartesian legacy and his sympathies on the side of materialism.

Descartes: A Biography, like Watson's volume, is the product of sustained and fruitful research. Clarke characterizes his as the first biography in English to address "the full range of Descartes' interests in theology, philosophy, and the sciences" (p. i). Clarke himself was trained in Catholic theology, and he brings this knowledge to bear on Descartes's discussion of transubstantiation and of free will in relation to predestination (Clarke finding Descartes's answers unsatisfactory). Watson also covers Descartes's engagements with theology, but with a different outlook: Clarke takes Descartes to be directly interested in proving the existence of God and the immortality of the soul in order to fulfill the theological charge of the Council of Trent to Catholic philosophers, and he treats his other theological efforts seriously and finds them wanting; whereas Watson (more plausibly, in my view) has Descartes presenting the arguments about God and the soul as a way of securing foundations for his physics and sees his other theological engagements as prudential (on behalf of his metaphysics or defending against the serious charge of atheism). Clarke's book, however, is not primarily focused on theological matters, and he covers Descartes's life and the circumstances of his philosophical and scientific publications in great detail. He is less kind to Descartes in some cases. Whereas Watson (as Rodis-Lewis) believes that Descartes formed a strong emotional attachment to his daughter and was shaken by her death, Clarke paints a cooler picture (p. 134). At the same time, he adds a new fact to the story, revealing (courtesy of private communication from Jeroen van de Ven) that Descartes later served as witness at Helena's wedding in 1644 and may have provided money to support the marriage (pp. 135–136). Clarke portrays Descartes as "a reclusive, cantankerous, and oversensitive loner" (p. 180), a judgment with which Watson only partly agrees (comparatively showing sympathy toward Descartes in his fallout with Beekman). No less than Watson, though perhaps

less openly, Clarke permits himself to speculate, as when he suggests that Descartes's discussion of prenatal mental states (an extension of his detailed theory of the passions or emotions) simply reflects his own postnatal memories of his wet nurse rather than "reliable medical research" (p. 10) or presents as established fact that Descartes did not receive the approbation of the Sorbonne (pp. 205–206), as he asserted on the title page of the first edition of the *Meditations* (1641). There are some odd lapses, as when Clarke baldly states that there is no indication prior to 1640 that Descartes "was remotely persuaded by skeptical doubts about the possibility of knowledge" (p. 189). This is doubly odd, for it appears to ignore the opening paragraphs of Part 4 of Descartes's *Discourse on the Method* (1637), which introduce skepticism based on dreaming, and it suggests that Descartes actually was persuaded of a skeptical threat after 1640, as opposed to his merely raising a more radical doubt in the *Meditations* than he had in the *Discourse* so that he could make more metaphysical hay through the instrument of his method of radical doubt. All said, Clarke's careful and thorough work is a welcome contribution.

Although each author describes the circumstances in which Descartes published his various works and gives some characterization of their contents and of Descartes's aim in composing them, neither enters into detail regarding their contents or results. For exposition of the scientific content of Descartes's works, especially, one should turn to Shea or Gaukroger—or to more specialized studies. Clarke provides a useful map and table of where Descartes lived and when. Each work has a modest but useful bibliography. Clarke's index is meager, Watson's extensive. The corrected paperback edition of Watson's work (which appeared in September 2007) is preferred.

Historians of science who are interested in Descartes's biography, as opposed to his scientific biography in particular, will be well served, in different ways, by these two works. Clarke's is a more standard biography, Watson's more personal. There is much to learn from each.

GARY HATFIELD

Anne Ashley Davenport. *Descartes's Theory of Action.* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 142.) xvii + 310 pp., bibl., index. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006. \$129 (cloth).

This is not the first book to deal with Descartes's religious convictions, but despite some limitations and questionable interpretations, it is one of the best. Anne Davenport's primary focus is on Descartes's development of the *ego* and its