
Philosophy and religion

RR 2017/122

Great Events in Religion: An Encyclopedia of Pivotal Events in Religious History

Edited by Florin Curta and Andrew Holt

ABC-CLIO

Santa Barbara, CA

2017

ISBN 978 1 61069 566 4

URL: www.abc-clio.com/ABC-CLIOCorporate/product.aspx?pc=A4249C

Last visited March 2017

Contact publisher for pricing information

Also available as a 3 vol. printed set (ISBN 978 1 61069 565 7 £239 \$310)

Keywords Encyclopedias, History, Religion

Review DOI [10.1108/RR-03-2017-0055](https://doi.org/10.1108/RR-03-2017-0055)

There is no doubt that the e-book format, in which this title here is reviewed, lends itself to a work of this scope which claims to include the key moments in the history of the world's religions. The print set is issued in three volumes: Vol. 1 *Prehistory to AD 600*; Vol. 2 *AD 600 to 1,450*; Vol. 3 *1450 to the Present*.

The start is good – each section has a link from a clear contents listing. However, when one reaches the text it is not easy on the eye. On my screen, the right-hand side was blank with the two columns of text taking up just the left-hand side of the page. I wonder if this is to make the use on a mobile phone easier. This may be the case, but it should be possible to accommodate various devices for download, and most scholars will want to work from a PC for the extended research. Zooming in makes reading easier, but it was slow when I viewed it. I was also not sure about the muted sequence of pages below a line at the foot of the text. This appeared to change the format of the pages but with no clarity as to how each layout differed.

On the pages themselves, there are sidebars which give a resources button. I had assumed this might give images. The three random pages where I downloaded this, it was the same picture, an image of the front cover of the book, and not a very clear one at that.

There is a good general bibliography. But this e-book version, as with other ABC-CLIO titles

in electronic format, is basically an impression of a print book not an electronic encyclopaedia. I had assumed there would be images alongside the text in an attractive e-format or that at least the images would be downloadable from the sidebars. This seems a wasted opportunity for displaying the high-quality content to the best advantage.

Working around the book is quite time-consuming. No doubt the scholarship is authoritative, and the aims are good to give historical accuracy and enable more understanding of the history of various faiths, but in this particular e-format it is not for the faint-hearted.

Stella Thebridge

Principal Librarian, Schools and Reading, Warwickshire Libraries, Warwick, UK

RR 2017/123

The Routledge Companion to Sixteenth-Century Philosophy

Edited by Henrik Lagerlund and Benjamin Hill

Routledge

New York and London

2017

xiv + 644 pp.

ISBN 978 0 415 65860 7 (print); ISBN 978 1 315 77051 2 (e-book)

£150 \$240 (print); £130 \$210 (e-book)

Routledge Companions to Philosophy

Keywords Philosophy, Sixteenth century

Review DOI [10.1108/RR-03-2017-0075](https://doi.org/10.1108/RR-03-2017-0075)

Most subjects seem simple and under-studied until you look at them closely. Sixteenth century philosophy is one of them. This *Companion* demonstrates just how much specialist research and scholarship has taken place in recent decades, and how complex the issues really are under the surface. Of course, specialists would say that, wouldn't they? Yet in this case, there is good reason to revisit and re-evaluate.

Superficial understandings of sixteenth century thought often bleed into crude contrasts with the mediaeval period, and underplay the sixteenth century at the expense of the seventeenth when “everything” (above scientific inquiry) appears to flourish. It is also a period where simplistic binarism – usually in the form of the scholastics versus the humanists, or the Catholics versus the Protestants, or the universities with the religious orders (above all the Jesuits and Dominicans). It can confuse modern readers, distort understandings of the past and reduce thinkers of the period to mere partisans for one cause or another – without admitting that many stayed neutral or went



Reference Reviews

Volume 31 · Number 5 · 2017 · pp. 8–10

© Emerald Publishing Limited · ISSN 0950-4125

eclectic or changed their minds. Another twist of value here is how the *Companion* rightly refuses to stick rigidly within the “century” – often the essays look back and forward, some explicitly going well into the seventeenth century because they have to do so. This offers intellectual coherence to many of the arguments.

Lagerlund and Hill are academics at the University of Western Ontario, each an established commentator in the field (the first on scepticism and logic, the second on language and mathematics), and they have assembled a strong international cadre of contributors. The 27 essays explore sixteenth century philosophy under four heads: Intellectual Background, Philosophical Movements, Philosophical Controversies and Philosophical Topics. The cast is international, though every essay is English-language, elegantly and idiomatically presented which suggests careful editing, even though there are more than a few signs of last-minute change and hurry – writers who seem to have dropped out, non-existent chapters referred to and little consistency in citation and bibliographical procedures. All that said, the quality of the commentary stands out for two overriding reasons – a step change on from the over-simplifications of earlier historiography and the subtlety and thoughtfulness of the material itself. The wealth of bibliographical sources presented here, alone, makes this a valuable resource.

Inevitably the old humanists versus scholastics debate comes up, and inevitably constant reference is made to Thomist and Scotist ideas, yet time and time again, the companion shows how things have moved on – Ramist debate took it forward; humanism was often sceptical even of itself; scholars like Telesio thought within both traditions (and did not regard them as “two”); thinkers then thought Averroes (whose translation of Aristotle was a hot text at the time) was neutral and saw themselves in the same light; and John Mair (or Major) declared himself as an eclectic. Even when one “side” attacked the other, the arguments were subtle (above all, when it came to discussion about God and the immortality of the soul) and fascinatingly complex, with more than a few echoes of debate today such as that between sceptics/atheists and faith followers, and between the liberal church and evangelical/fundamentalist forms of belief.

Intellectual background offers a backdrop to the specific ideas presented later on. We get a snapshot of the intellectual world Descartes would have known through his education, the authors he read and what they said, how this sat within the framework of thinking about dialectics and metaphysics, how figures like Petrarch and Erasmus and Ignatius featured in this.

Discoveries and exploration opened up power and trade, but also how they thought about civilization and other cultures and faiths, about providence and mission. Classical scholarship opened up ideas for scholars like Poliziano and Pomponazzi and Pico, and for the novice reader names they may not naturally have encountered before. Buridan’s *Dialectics* was one work of many that shaped the use and teaching of logic (a theme picked up in later essays), while new adaptations of scepticism were necessary to accommodate and utilise nominalism (as applied to everything and not just the nature of God). The complexity of the debate about unicity (being, and in particular human intellect, is one, as opposed to body and soul as the Christians had it) arising from Latin translations of Averroes (in turn translator of Aristotle) was vigorous and wide-ranging.

The momentum from these introductory chapters feeds through into the other sections of the *Companion*. Indeed, cross-over between the sections and the essays themselves, is pervasive, and reinforced by a helpfully comprehensive general index. Section 2, Philosophical Movements, takes the reader into the work of the Jesuits (in particular, their doctrinal and educational projects), into the work of the “reformers” (Luther and Melancthon, Zingli and Calvin), and into the neo-Stoicism of Justus Lipsius. In each essay, it is made clear that historians can easily skate over major figures of a period without understanding context – the impact of other writers, the ambivalences of the major arguments, even the personal dilemmas and risks that accrued from believing certain things and writing books about them (as Milton found later on).

Section 3 examines Philosophical Controversies – the Pomponazzi “affair” (where the debate ranged from interpretations of Aristotle and Plato to interactions with the Papacy, and engaged the attention of scholars like Contarini and Spini, Nifo and Cardano). Logic and dialectics, too, went through paradigmatic upheaval with the Ramist controversy central to understanding the teaching of philosophy in Germany at the time. The wider map of historical affairs also constantly changed – the regicides of Henry III and IV in France, and eventually Charles I in England, debate whether the Pope was superior to the sovereign (part of an anti-Catholic debate that has never gone away), with Puritans attacking Jesuits and philosophical argumentation about the justification of political power.

Most wide-ranging of all, and the most conventional in terms of companion like reference works, is Section 4 on Philosophical Topics. These make handy watering holes for

students relatively new to the field (including people in other fields like the history of ideas). Typical topics are scepticism (a dialogue with the important work of Popkin, with a neat focus on Montaigne), science or “scientia” (not just Galileo but others like Nifo, who wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s *physics*), language (by the prolific author Ashworth), natural philosophy (which found itself trying to disentangle the enigma of creation and the soul), the problematic of the soul itself (a nice contrast between Suarez of the Jesuits, the work of Melancthon and neo-Stoicism), metaphysics (again Suarez, along with Telesio), causation and free will and ethics and natural law (e.g. as interpreted by the Catholic and Protestant traditions).

In all these, we find evidence that, when specialists get to work, a lot of new stuff emerges: the *Companion* is strong in alerting readers to the many (often elusive) figures of note that many of us have inadvertently ignored, perhaps because we did not know they were there – Telesio and de Soto, for example, Fonseca and Fernel and Pererius and Gerhard. These may be the Salieri to music’s Mozart, but they have been under-studied. The interplay between them and the thinkers who more

publicly have survived is crucial to an understanding of sixteenth century philosophy, and goes well beyond the simplistic binarisms identified at the start of this review. There were over-arching discussions, too, shaping the advocacy of different factions and organizations, such as how rational to be in our inquiry into the nature of God or the immateriality of the soul. In a sense, then, every essay in the *Companion* addresses one controversy or another, reminding the reader that the history of ideas is never as simple as it seems.

The *Companion* appears in a well-established series from Routledge (which already has companions on the philosophy of religion, ancient philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, epistemology and others). Others forthcoming likely to interest readers are ones on seventeenth century philosophy, mediaeval philosophy and free will. Lagerlund and Hill are correct to say that this period often sits awkwardly in the wider historiography of philosophical history and they have been right to set out to correct it. Very much a work for the research/academic library and for the dedicated scholar.

Stuart Hannabuss

*Independent Reviewer and Researcher,
Aberdeen, UK*