

The vast majority of the exhibits listed in this catalogue are usually on permanent display in various central German museums, most particularly in Kassel (Hessisches Landesmuseum; Museum für Astronomie und Technikgeschichte), in Lemgo (Weserrenaissance-Museum) and in Eichenzell near Fulda (Schloß Fasanerie). This alone should guarantee that this catalogue will not outlive its usefulness for quite some time. While it is to be hoped that the current historical knowledge concerning Maurice will eventually be synthesized into a biography proper, this catalogue could certainly be regarded as a very reasonable starting point for the time being.

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STEPHEN GAUKROGER (editor and translator), *R. Descartes, The World and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xxxvi+208 pp. £13.95, ISBN 0521-636469 (pbk); £37.50, ISBN 0521-631580 (hbk).

Gaukroger has edited various texts of Descartes: the *Treatise on Light*, the *Treatise on Man*, the *Description of the Human Body* (first time in English) and two appendixes—the second discourse of the *Dioptrics* and the eighth discourse of the *Meteors*. Usually, we find each treatise separately, because Descartes never published them in his lifetime. He wrote them between 1629 and 1633, but when he was finishing the Inquisition condemned Galileo and Descartes did not give ‘his world’ to the world (*Oeuvres* (ed. Adam and Tannery), vol. 1, 281). Some years later, when he wrote the *Discourse on Method*, in Part V he wrote a review about a treatise *The World*. Originally, this was just one set of treatises. After Descartes died, his brother in law, Clerselier, published separately the *Treatise on Light* and the *Treatise on Man*.

*The World* was the most ambitious project that Descartes ever undertook. He proposed a mechanistic doctrine to explain both a new cosmology and also a mechanistic physiology. This mechanistic theory was to ‘explain all natural phenomena, that is, the whole of physics’ (*ibidem*, 70).

The subject of the *Treatise on Light* is inanimate nature. From his mechanistic position Descartes explained the characteristics of light, the Sun and the fixed stars. His world had no empty regions, for all is matter, ‘res extensa’; and this matter could move. But he did not talk about natural place; for now there are laws of motion, he does not need mysterious forces acting at a distance. As Gaukroger says in his Introduction: ‘The heliocentric theory is derived from a very simple theory of matter, three laws of motion, and the motion of a centrifugal force.’ It is a world where every star is a solar system with its own planets in orbit, the theory of vortices is a defence of the plurality of worlds, with the same matter in every place and the same law for nature.

In these other worlds there are humans with the same characteristics as us. The *Treatise of Man* was chapter XVIII of *The World*; we know this from Part V of *Discourse* and various letters (*ibidem*, 120, 242, 254, 263). For Descartes the human body is a machine, is ‘res extensa’ too, and it is possible to explain it by the mechanistic doctrine. The human body is similar to an artificial fountain, and Descartes explains the bones, nerves, muscles, etc, everything ‘which this machine must be composed’. The *Description of the Human Body* is a continuation of the same problems, with a description and explanation of functions.

*The World* was a new scientific paradigm: Aristotelianism was dead. Descartes built a new physical system, the first in modern science. From the mechanism it is possible to explain the cosmos and the human body, how nature is run on general laws. We must contrast Descartes with Aristotle, because the world of Descartes was created to explain the new discoveries and the new rationality of the seventeenth century.

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