John Sutton. *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xvii + 372 pp. Ill. $69.95.

This is a somewhat unusual book. Written by a philosopher, it aims to make historical materials relevant to current discussions on the philosophy of mind. In particular, Sutton seeks to draw parallels between modern connectionist theories of memory and the doctrine of animal spirits that, in various forms, held sway as an account of the physical mechanism of memory for much of the early modern period. He is aware that eyebrows are likely to be raised by such an approach: it carries a danger of distorting the ideas of a previous epoch by insisting on their similarities to later doctrine. Sutton adopts an avowedly "skewed" historiographic approach; he "must flirt throughout with the twin dangers of nostalgia and present-centredness" (p. 15).

For most of the book Sutton, in fact, successfully steers his way between these twin perils. His discussion of historical materials is for the most part judicious and sensitive to context. He manages to expand upon what may seem a narrow and technical issue to show how discourse about memory was implicated in and contributed to cultural concerns with the nature of agency, control, and identity. "Notions about selves," Sutton maintains, "in relation to natural and social worlds are always implicated in theorising about memories" (p. 13). While localist models of memory were supportive of a strong executive self presiding over a stable and credible stock of recollections, more dynamic theories of how memories were created and sustained carried disturbing intimations. If memories were—quite literally—fluid, then error, illusion, and even fantasy might hold sway; the integrity of the self could dissolve amid the swirling of the spirits.

Such frightening consequences were not intended by the authors of the doctrine of animal spirits. But there was an excess inherent in the system that evaded attempts to preserve the authority of the sovereign self. Sutton concentrates on treatments of animal spirits in English natural philosophy. He argues that a special concern with memory was part of a more general preoccupation with order in the aftermath of the civil war and the heady days of the Commonwealth. In this context there was a felt need for discipline and stability within the body as well as within society. Theories that undermined these values were deemed immoral as well as erroneous.

Rather than developing these themes, Sutton asks "what use is all this history?" (p. 149). His answer is that a historical perspective can illuminate the issues involved in the choice between distributed and local theories of memory, even though the distinction would not have been intelligible to the historical actors themselves. Such an approach is somewhat frustrating to the historian; others must judge its philosophical utility. Nonetheless, this book does suggest a range of avenues for further research: the discussion of John Locke's theory of personal identity is especially stimulating.

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