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Review of: Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind*

Jan V. Golinski

University of New Hampshire, Durham, jan.golinski@unh.edu

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Sorana Corneanu. *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition.*

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. ix + 308 pp. \$50. ISBN: 978-0-226-11639-6.

Sorana Corneanu's book concerns the significance of classical traditions of self-cultivation in early modern natural philosophy. Specifically, she is interested in the practice she calls *cultura animi* (more familiar under Michel Foucault's term, "care of the self") among philosophers in seventeenth-century England. The book is an impressive work of intellectual history, displaying a remarkable depth of learning, and thoroughly documented in both primary and secondary sources. It advances an important thesis that demands the attention of historians of science and philosophy. The author's basic claim is that discussions of epistemology and method in this period were also — and perhaps fundamentally — debates about how the mind should be regulated with the aim of moral improvement.

Several schools of ancient philosophy contributed to these traditions. Corneanu carefully disentangles the threads of Platonic, Epicurean, and Stoic thought, and describes their melding with Christian doctrine in the early centuries of the Common Era. Following the revival of these traditions during the Renaissance, many early modern philosophers took up the task of curing the diseases of the soul that could disturb proper judgment. In the seventeenth century, the study of nature was championed as an aid to ethical self-development. Corneanu reads Francis Bacon as diagnosing obstacles to knowledge that arose from distempers of the mind, including the kind of egocentrism that led either to dogmatism or to excessive credulity. According to Bacon and his followers, empirical inquiry, if properly conducted, encouraged the virtues of patience and humility. Corneanu sees Robert Boyle as a significant figure in this line of thought, especially for his emphasis on mental self-control to rein in a tendency to jump to conclusions prematurely. At the end of the century, John Locke brought the tradition to a climax with his empiricist philosophy, in which the limited

powers of the human mind were to be focused on the impressions of the senses and developed by habitual practice.

Along with her meticulous reconstruction of the thinking of these individuals, Corneanu sometimes indulges in rather blunt assertions as to the superiority of her approach over those of others. She disputes Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's claim that solutions to the problem of knowledge served the need for social order in the period. On the contrary, she insists, "concern with the social dimensions of knowledge was rooted in a concern with the good ordering of the mind" (12). Presenting her own view of early modern objectivity as essentially a matter of individual ethics, she contrasts this rather sharply with the cultural model of objectivity advanced in Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's recent book. At the same time, however, she insists that hers is a study of intellectual history, not of personal psychology. She therefore disclaims any interest in the questions concerning Boyle's subjectivity explored by Michael Hunter, the most prominent Boyle scholar of recent years.

Though they do not undermine the value of her work, such issues cannot be resolved as easily as Corneanu assumes. The question of how her inquiry relates to those undertaken with slightly different agendas remains open. Readers are likely to ponder this as they reflect on the wider ramifications of the topics she mentions. One might ask, for example, how regimens of the mind related to those directed at the body. Since they believed in the propensity of the passions to disturb the workings of the mind, early modern thinkers often devoted considerable care to their bodies through deliberate choices of diet, medication, exercise, climate, and so on. Also absent here is the issue of gender. Corneanu discusses no female authors, so readers are not told how women might have situated themselves in relation to the *cultura animi* tradition, or what men's self-cultivation might say about their identity as men. Finally, there is nothing about the specific practices of experimentation or observation, so readers are likely to wonder how philosophical positions about the study of nature were translated into the actual production of scientific knowledge. These questions remain to be taken up by other scholars. Those who do so will have many reasons to be grateful to Sorana Corneanu for this excellent and fascinating book.

JAN GOLINSKI

University of New Hampshire