

Humanities

Murray Miles. *Inroads: Paths in Ancient and Modern Western Philosophy*
University of Toronto Press 2003. xxiv, 670. \$39.95

Murray Miles's *Inroads: Paths in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* is a unique book. Running to 650 pages, *Inroads* covers a lot of ground – surveying issues that are normally ignored by many advanced introductory philosophy texts. Miles discusses the origins of philosophy, its relation to mythico-religious thought, its relationship to science, and even the role philosophy plays in higher education (all in the first section of the book). We find long chapters devoted to Socrates, Plato, Descartes, Hume, and Sartre, making the bulk of the text. Many others make an appearance, but the focus and detail of *Inroads* is upon these. Why these figures? Most of these philosophers appear in introductory courses in philosophy and rightly so, given the importance of their ideas to the history of thought. Including Sartre is Miles's own particular contribution, a decision not so often taken by others, and it is a good choice, since Sartre has a certain attraction to young philosophers, despite his near neglect by current scholars of European philosophy. In each section devoted to these philosophers we find skilful, detailed critical analyses, along with background historical information – all extremely useful for the student and scholar alike.

Miles also has an idea of philosophy itself: 'philosophy is above all a matter of acquiring and learning how to apply the tools of critical analysis and reflection; of interpreting and weighing evidence, arguments and counter-arguments; and of assessing critically and impartially the fruitfulness of various approaches to a special set of problems arising out of the universal condition of mankind.' *Inroads* certainly lives up to this image of philosophy, providing us with many detailed analyses of Miles's favorite texts: the *Meno* and Descartes' *Meditations*. Philosophy, like so many complex disciplines, will become a technical discipline, and Miles's analyses illustrate this well. Miles continues and says that the special problems must be given some solution 'if human life is to have that moral and intellectual basis without which, it seems, genuine human flourishing is just not possible.' What philosophy is, I admit I do not really know, but Miles's focus upon the universal condition of mankind is just too human-centred for my taste and philosophical practice. Nor am I so certain that without solutions to certain philosophical problems, even those in ethics, human life cannot flourish. The life of a philosopher is not for everyone, and human flourishing is so multifaceted that many lead worthwhile lives with little attempt to penetrate philosophical mysteries.

The detail of *Inroads* is impressive, but sometimes rather daunting. Miles is keen on distinctions, keeping ideas clear, yet every page is full of

numerical or alphabetical references back to propositions stated and explained earlier in the chapter. Naturally, for the sake of rigour, we have to distinguish between different interpretations and subtly different philosophical claims, but after 650 pages something of the pleasure of reading philosophy becomes lost. However, tools, textbooks, guides, and study aids are rarely gripping reads, and since *Inroads* is a good study guide to the primary texts, perhaps rigour ought to win out.

Miles's choice of figures to discuss is not so controversial, but the weight of the book appears to fall on Socrates and Plato, who together command almost half the text. Although designed for the beginner or intermediate undergraduate, Miles's book also integrates material from his scholarly publications on Descartes. Combining introductory material with one's own scholarship is tempting and understandable, but it contributes to the technical tone of the text that limits its immediate appeal to the beginner. The unevenness is made more dramatic when one compares, for example, the very introductory and, I thought, unnecessary chapter on philosophy and logic with the painstaking detail of the chapters on Descartes.

But *Inroads* does provide one path into the philosophical forest and is a reliable and useful text (despite one misleading description of Pierre Gassendi as a reductive materialist). Students and teachers will benefit from *Inroads*, for it contains a wealth of useful and pertinent information. The best side of *Inroads*, I believe, is its integration of analysis with historical sensitivity – putting philosophers and their ideas back into the contexts that gave them birth. (BRIAN GARRETT)

Murray Clarke. *Reconstructing Reason and Representation*

MIT Press. x, 192. US \$35.00

As its title indicates, Murray Clarke's *Reconstructing Reason and Representation* tackles the ambitious project of rethinking the foundations of the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of mind. He invites philosophers to shed their traditional, *a priori* views on the nature of knowledge, justification, rationality, and representation to make place for a naturalistic approach to these disciplines. As such, his project is part of a growing stream of proposals to naturalize such diverse matters as ethical norms and human consciousness.

The book begins with a defence of John Tooby and Leda Cosmides's thesis that the mind is composed of domain-specific modules which have evolved to solve narrow problems throughout the natural history of mankind. There is little doubt that perception and motor control are implemented in the brain by specific, well-delimited modules, but Tooby,