Ralf Bader and John Meadowcroft, eds.


It is now almost four decades since the publication of Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974. Hereafter *ASU*). Thus, a new collection of essays on less examined aspects of Nozick’s book is an intriguing prospect. One might wonder what more can be said about *ASU*, and in particular, whether anything new can be said without plunging into a thicket of secondary literature. Such scepticism might be fuelled by Nozick’s own avowed intent to not revisit *ASU*, and the consensus of critics that the overall argument of *ASU* is unsuccessful. Happily, this excellent collection of essays shows that plenty can be said in response to Nozick, and interesting and significant conclusions can be drawn from direct engagement with the key premises of *ASU*.

Bader and Meadowcroft’s introduction highlights their twin aims of focusing on relatively neglected parts of *ASU*, and of assessing the extent to which it presents a unified and coherent theory. The eleven chapters of the *Cambridge Companion* are grouped into four parts: ‘Morality’, ‘Anarchy’, ‘Justice’ and ‘Utopia’. This grouping feels natural and logical, no mean feat given the range and richness of topics within *ASU*.

Part I, ‘Morality’, comprises three chapters. In chapter 1, Richard Arneson argues that Nozick fails to secure the conclusion that absolute side constraints exist. Arneson argues that Nozick’s theory leaves room for a more plausible moderate approach, which combines side constraints and end-state constraints. In the second chapter, Michael Otsuka argues that side constraints prohibiting the sacrifice of individuals may not minimize such violations overall. Thus, Otsuka argues, side constraints are prima facie irrational. Part I concludes with a chapter by Fred Feldman on Nozick’s ‘Experience Machine’ example. Feldman considers which views Nozick was targeting with his ‘Experience Machine’ thought experiment. Feldman concludes that four popular readings of the ‘Experience Machine’ are misguided, since the thought experiment does not defeat its supposed targets, and textual support for these readings is lacking. Feldman concludes by suggesting a more plausible fifth reading of Nozick’s ‘experience machine’, though he concedes that this also lacks textual support.

The second part of the collection, ‘Anarchy’, turns to Nozick’s arguments for the possibility and justification of a more-than-minimal state. In chapter 4, Eric Mack points to the instability of some of Nozick’s responses to the anarchist. Mack concludes that a more stable extrapolated response would in fact give support for a ‘minimal taxing state’ – successfully answering the charges
of the anarchist, but perhaps going further than Nozick intended. In chapter 5, Gerald Gaus turns to Nozick’s meta-theoretical commitments, and considers the effectiveness of ‘invisible hand’ accounts such as Nozick’s account of the emergence of a state. Gaus concludes that even hypothetical invisible hand accounts are informative and provide justification for the emergence of a state which need not be inherently immoral.

Part III, ‘Justice’, forms the major part of the book. Peter Vallentyne argues in chapter 6 that Nozick’s account of justice is based on the respect of individual rights. Vallentyne fills in this account with the addition of principles against injustice, and principles regarding self-ownership rights. In the later sections of this chapter, Vallentyne turns to Nozick’s Wilt Chamberlain example, and argues that Nozick can avoid an implausible commitment to absolute rights by supplementing a procedural account of justice with a moderate set of property rights. In the next chapter, John Meadowcroft assesses the effectiveness of Nozick’s critique of Rawls. Meadowcroft concludes that Nozick is more successful than many imagine: he succeeds in defending the importance of entitlement to any theory of justice, and Nozick is right to highlight some questionable Rawlsian assumptions.

In chapter 8, David Schmidtz engages with Nozick’s critique of Rawls, and covers a range of questions relating to patterned versus unpatterned distributions. Schmidtz begins with a clear summary of various forms of patterned distributions, and argues that Nozick’s critique of patterned distributions does not defeat weakly patterned distributions. Schmidtz then takes up a bold position concerning the Lockean Proviso on initial appropriation (in pages 175–176 of *Asu*, Nozick discusses the fact that some interpretations of this proviso – ‘leave enough and as good for others’ – might lead to a regress which prohibits any appropriation of finite resources). Schmidtz contends that ‘property sceptics’ are unjustified in hijacking this proviso in their efforts to show that private ownership cannot be justified. Schmidtz is right to argue that there could well be ‘non zero-sum’ appropriation cases where early appropriations do not diminish what is available to later appropriators. But he pushes the claim too far the other way, in my view. His assertion that we live in a “magic cookie-jar” world (p. 210) where initial appropriations have no impact on the resources available to others is a bold claim, and seems to ignore large classes of finite natural resources such as fish stocks, mature forest, and fossil fuels. Thus, it is doubtful that the problems posed by the Lockean Proviso have been dissolved as readily as is claimed by Schmidtz. There are other points in Schmidtz’s chapter where he attempts to defend strong libertarian premises which many will find controversial, such as the futility of rectifying past injustices. In this, Schmidtz’s chapter stands out from the other essays in this collection: while