As the title indicates, this short book is intended to summarize the medieval contribution to what is now commonly referred to as cognitive psychology—“the psychology of how we acquire, process, and remember information about the world” (p. 1). The book focuses on developments that occurred in the Latin West with the recovery of Aristotle’s *De Anima* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the influx of Muslim philosophical treatises around the same time. The central chapters deal with the reception of Avicenna’s physiological theory of the inner senses (chapter 4), and medieval debates surrounding the nature and implications of intellectual cognition (chapter 5). The other chapters, which are largely subordinate to these two, provide some necessary historical background (chapters 1-3), discuss certain areas of inquiry in which medieval cognitive theories figured prominently (chapter 6), and compare medieval cognitive theories with those developed by contemporary academic psychologists (chapter 7). The book is written in a non-technical style, and is intended “to be comprehensible to someone who knows a little about present-day psychological thinking” (p. 2).

Although this book contains a number of serious flaws, which I shall discuss below, it has the virtue of being well organized and well conceived. Kemp’s decision to focus on the later part of the Middle Ages makes good sense, and his chapter on the inner senses is by far the best in the book. In this chapter, Kemp provides a useful introduction to medieval physiology of the brain, and then uses this to describe the various psychological processes that different medieval philosophers located in different parts of the brain. His strategy of examining Avicenna’s account in detail, and then characterizing other medieval theories in terms of it, is also well motivated. As Kemp points out, Avicenna's account was highly influential in the Latin West (p.
52), and helped medieval Latin philosophers and theologians to see how a theory of the inner senses might be reconciled with Aristotle’s discussion of the common sense, imagination, memory, and the role of the heart in cognition (p. 59).

Although Kemp is right to emphasize the importance of Avicenna’s account of the inner senses, his suggestion that all later medieval theories can be characterized as slight modifications of it is highly artificial. As Kemp himself notes, later medieval philosophers certainly appear to diverge widely from Avicenna at significant points, including the number of psychological processes and their precise location in the brain. Rather than exploit these apparent differences to his advantage, however, Kemp explains most of them away, suggesting that they are in fact “more apparent than real” (p. 52). Even when Kemp thinks he’s hit upon a genuine difference, his exposition is often too coarse-grained to capture it. At several points, for example, he claims that Aquinas differs from Avicenna in denying the existence of a cogitative power altogether (pp. 51-2). But a casual glance at the reference Kemp cites in support of this claim reveals that, far from denying the existence of such a power, Aquinas explicitly admits it, denying only that this power is distinct in human beings from that of estimation (cf. Summa theologiae, I, q. 78, a. 4).

The kind of historical and philosophical insensitivity to which I have just called attention is characteristic of Kemp's discussion throughout the book, but it is perhaps especially pronounced in the early parts, where Kemp attempts to orient the reader to his project. In the first three chapters, Kemp outlines certain aspects of medieval intellectual history, and attempts to summarize Aristotle’s cognitive psychology, along with the most important psychological ideas in circulation in Western Europe prior to the recovery of Aristotle. He accomplishes all of this in less than 50 pages, so it is not surprising that this discussion is cursory, vague, and impressionistic. What is surprising, however, is the sheer number of factual errors it contains. Some of these appear to be due to mere sloppiness, as when Kemp inadvertently suggests that Augustine may have read Boethius’s Latin translation of Aristotle’s Categories, though of course it wasn't written until nearly a hundred years after Augustine’s death (pp. 24-5). Most of the
errors, however, appear to be traceable to lack of historical and philosophical expertise. For example, when Kemp illustrates Aristotle’s distinction between the essential and accidental features of a thing, he gives two examples of accidental features, claiming that knowledge of English is among his essential attributes (p. 33). Again, when he takes up the so-called problem of universals, he runs together a number of distinct issues in metaphysics and epistemology, and badly misunderstands the nature of the debate, largely because he fails to distinguish between universal attributes and universal propositions (pp. 33-4; cf. Also pp. 69-70). Unfortunately, many more such examples could be cited.

In fairness to Kemp, it must be said that he is at least aware of his limitations. To his credit, moreover, he does not try to conceal them, but begins his book with a forthright acknowledgment of them:

Most modern analysis of the *De Anima* and other psychological works of the Middle Ages has been conducted by philosophers, theologians, and historians. I have read and admired some of this work and regard the level of scholarship that these writers attain as enviable but (for me) unattainable. However, I hope that my own perspective—that of the academic psychologist—might, despite its obvious limitations, also have something worthwhile to contribute. (p. vii)

Even if these remarks do not quite excuse the quality of his scholarship, they do suggest that it would be a mistake to focus exclusively on it. For in doing so we may overlook the sort of contribution which Kemp, as a trained academic psychologist, may be uniquely qualified to make. Kemp does appear to have an overall sense of what is important in medieval psychology—the sorts of concerns that motivate it, as well as the type of approach that is characteristic of it. As is clear from his bibliography, moreover, he is actively involved in contemporary academic psychology, having made several recent published contributions to the field. One might expect, therefore, that despite his other limitations, Kemp would be in a unique position to provide a critical assessment of the medieval contribution to cognitive psychology.

Even here, however, Kemp fails us. The book is completely lacking in any substantive engagement or evaluation of medieval cognitive psychology, and hence does little to advance our
understanding of the medieval achievement in this regard. Kemp does make some effort, especially in his last chapter, to call our attention to certain similarities and differences that exist between medieval and modern cognitive theories. But many of these comparisons are so superficial or obvious that one wonders whether, in a scholarly context, they warrant mentioning at all.

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