Armand Maurer. *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles*. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999.

Someone must be looking out for William Ockham. Excommunicated and exiled in his own lifetime, Ockham's philosophical works were revitalized in the twentieth century like those of no other medieval author. The two best medieval monographs of the century, from a philosophical point of view, were studies of Ockham.[i] And while the still unfinished *Opera Omnia* of Aquinas and Scotus plodded along, a brilliant group of scholars assembled in Olean, New York, to publish Ockham's *Opera Philosophica et Theologica* over a mere twenty-three years.[ii] And in a century that saw sophisticated bodies of philosophical scholarship grow up around the ancient and early modern periods, only Ockham among the medievals can lay claim to anything remotely analogous.[iii]

Now Armand Maurer, at a mere 84 years of age, has managed to slip one more contribution into a century that, for Ockham Studies, was already venerable enough. It should be said from the start that Maurer's volume cannot compare, in philosophical detail and sophistication, with Marilyn Adams's even longer book on the subject. But this is nevertheless an important and valuable work. Maurer seeks to provide an introduction to Ockham's philosophy (10) and he succeeds entirely, in a manner worthy of comparison to Copleston and perhaps even Gilson.

It is surprisingly difficult to determine just what Maurer means by `the philosophy of Ockham.' He does not have in mind the medieval sense of `philosophy.' Though the volume begins with logic and metaphysics, and devotes a long chapter to physics, it is Ockham's *Opera Theologica* that receive most of Maurer's attention. But the focus is also not philosophy in the usual modern sense. Maurer structures the work much as a medieval theologian might:

Part I. Principles   Part II. God   Part III. Creatures.
Part II contains an interesting discussion of the Trinity; Part III devotes a whole chapter to angels. Maurer speaks at one point of "the theologian who is also a philosopher" (295). Perhaps `philosophy' should be understood to denote a certain rationalistic method of inquiry, rather than a fixed subject-matter. In this sense, virtually all of Ockham's works can be considered philosophical, which suits with the broad scope of Maurer's study. (The neglect among philosophers of Ockham's later political writings is so widespread that it can almost go without saying that these works are neglected here, too.)

We might wish that more theologians today were philosophical in this sense. But would we want them to be philosophers in the manner of Ockham? Maurer would not. One noteworthy feature of this volume is that it does not attempt to defend Ockhamism. "The author is not a devotee of that philosophy; but he wrote the book in the first place not to criticize it but to elucidate it" (10).

In some respects this stance gives the study a refreshing neutrality, but it will frustrate readers who prefer a more critical engagement with the issues. To the extent Maurer does take critical aim, his target is most often Ockham's "new conception of reality as radically individual" (9). But though Maurer occasionally rewards us with a few dry remarks about the feasibility of this conception (e.g., 292, 425), there is nothing like a developed investigation into its merits.

As his title suggests, Maurer believes that most of Ockham's distinctive views can be traced back to a few basic principles. He stresses Ockham's commitment to "empirical and linguistic approaches" to philosophy (440) — a phrase that is surely apt but that Maurer never precisely articulates. Parsimony and divine omnipotence also come in for attention. Most important by far, however, is Ockham's focus on the individual. Maurer finds this so-called nominalism — which he says might just as well be called conceptualism (64) — at the root of almost all Ockham's distinctive doctrines, including his thinking about causality (171-72), the divine names (204, 286-88), divine ideas (224), human nature (451), and epistemology (476). Sometimes, though, Maurer pushes too hard, as when he claims that after rejecting Scotus's common natures, Ockham was "bound to rule out all instants of nature" (237), and that it became "inevitable" that Ockham would reformulate Scotus's distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition (476). In these cases, the connections

seem tenuous.[iv]

In a book this large and wide-ranging, there are bound to be mistakes. On 28.16, read *confused* for *common*. On 28.18, read *Every man* for *Man*. Maurer sometimes uses `knowledge' to translate *cognitio* or *apprehensio*, which leads to a number of confusions ⸺ e.g., to the clearly false claim that "it is possible to form a proposition and know it without giving one's assent or dissent to it" (95). When Ockham says that one sense of `possibility' *est commune* to two other senses, Maurer wrongly takes this to mean it is "equivalent" (250). Ockham instead means that it is entailed by each of the other two senses. Lastly, it completely misses Ockham's point to remark, "in an eternal world, *some* revolution is infinitely distant" (322). What Ockham holds, quite correctly, is that in a universe with an infinite future, there will always be a further revolution of the earth, to infinity. But no one revolution will be (or could be) infinitely far into the future.

Robert Pasnau, University of Colorado

i. Ernest Moody, *The Logic of William of Ockham* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935); Marilyn Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

ii. St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1967-1989. Sadly, St. Bonaventure University has in recent years eviscerated the Franciscan Institute.

iii. This literature has centered around the work of Paul Spade, ground zero being his acclaimed web site: http://pvspade.com/Logic/index.html. Maurer does an admirable job of acknowledging and incorporating this recent scholarship.

iv. Maurer is perhaps too captivated by Heidegger's clever remark, "Every thinker thinks but one single thought" (540). But though the concluding chapter embraces this thought (presumably not Heidegger's only one), an earlier chapter offers an antithetical epigram, ascribed to the French philosopher Victor Delbos:
Every philosophical doctrine is the result not of one principle but of a
    compromise among a number of principles, some of which serve to prevent any
    one of the others from developing the whole train of its consequences
    (488).
Maurer is at his best when working in a French rather than a German mode.