

Luc Foisneau (dir.), Dictionnaire des philosophes français du XVII^e siècle. Acteurs et réseaux du savoir. Avec la collaboration d'Élisabeth Dutartre-Michaut et de Christian Bachelier. Traductions de Delphine Bellis, Luc Foisneau et Claire Gallien, Paris (Classiques Garnier) 2020, 2100 p. (Dictionnaires et synthèses, 3), ISBN 978-2-8124-1721-4, EUR 89,00.

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Alan Charles Kors, Philadelphia

In 2008, Luc Foisneau directed the publication of a two-volume »Dictionary of Seventeenth-Century French Philosophers«. This is far more than a French version of that first work. It is a new work, revised and augmented by well over a hundred new contributions, by introductory thematic essays, by rich and particularly thoughtful primary and secondary bibliographies for each philosopher, and by a lengthy and exceptionally useful scholarly index. The *Dictionnaire* is a gift to any researcher, student, or scholar with an interest in early modern French philosophy writ large.

Researchers looking for thinkers merely mentioned in articles but not given an entry of their own are well-served by the »Index historique et raisonné« that occupies the final 300 pages of this 2100-page work. Such thinkers are well-identified by their works, contexts, and affiliations. Scholars might argue over the principles of exclusion or inclusion utilized in assembling the critical index (I was disappointed by the absence of the historically important and philosophically interesting François de La Pillionière, François-Marie-Pompée Colonne, and the chevalier Ramsay from both the main entries and the index), but that is unavoidable in such an undertaking. Indeed, the very choice of articles itself, not to mention the length assigned to diverse articles, can be a minefield. Excluding bibliography, for example, Nicolas Malebranche earns an article of 6 pages; René Descartes, 7; Pierre Gassendi, 8.5; and Antoine Arnauld, 10. That will displease someone.

The articles on major philosophers are generally excellent in terms of breadth; explication of systems, arguments, and debates; and both primary and secondary bibliography. Where the *Dictionnaire* truly distinguishes itself from all other reference works, however, is in its accounts, analyses, and contextualization of those seventeenth century formal philosophers, theologians, savants, polemicists, and critics who were figures of influence in their time but who have fallen into relative obscurity even among most intellectual historians and historians of philosophy. Seventeenth century France witnessed a flowering of philosophical publication that drew an ever-expanding audience into the world of ideas. The *Dictionnaire* repopulates that flowering and that world.



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I wish, however, that the *Dictionnaire* had done much more with the philosophical education of that population. It is a century where almost all higher education, both in the *collèges* and the *universités* begins with *philosophie*. That grounding in logic, method, metaphysics, and philosophical theology varied, but it centered on Aristotle and his Christian interpreters. Almost every thinker represented by an article in this work received some variant of that grounding. Some individual contributors discuss the influence of that education and their subjects' responses to it, but the topic, by its importance, required a more systemic approach. What were the continuities, modifications, and rejections by our thinkers of the philosophy taught in the schools, and what was the philosophical importance, thus, of those who did that teaching and of those who wrote or critically edited the textbooks? The thematic essays that begin the work are the ideal place to address the formation of the thinkers who follow, but it does not occur. Jacob Schmutz's essay on philosophical and theological scholasticism focuses on its role in general terms and gives us little sense of a seventeenth century education in Aristotelian philosophy and the great philosophical-theological commentaries, ubiquitous in the curricula of the schools.

The inattention to the actual furniture of the mind provided by seventeenth century formal education is systemic in the *Dictionnaire*. Jean Nicolai edited, with explanatory notes and commentaries, the works of Thomas Aquinas, philosophical and theological, in a major contribution to the Thomist revival of which he was a part. The article on Nicolai, however, focuses on his debates with the Jansenists on sin and grace, not touching on his dissemination of Aquinas's thought, let alone on Aquinas's commentaries on Aristotle (or Nicolai's commentaries on those). The bibliography that concludes the article ignores the Dominican scholar's editing of the 23-volume »Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia«, published from 1660–1664 with his important notes. Guillaume Du Val's edition of Aristotle's »Opera Omnia«, with commentary, enjoyed three editions in the seventeenth century. It was a staple of education, and many later philosophers cut their teeth on his critical work. Guillaume Du Val receives neither article nor even mention in the *index raisonné*. Pierre Barbay was the author of the texts that were most widely used in the schools and universities to teach Aristotle. His students believed in his genius and produced the lecture notes from which Barbay's great texts were constructed; Barbay's works essentially taught French students their Aristotle in the second half of the seventeenth century. He receives a rather dismissive article of one page in the *Dictionnaire*.

Excellent authors were turned loose on their subjects, as should have been the case. Some were more concerned with their philosopher's place in the longer-term history of philosophy, and some more interested in the seventeenth century context, its debates, and its polemics. Some stressed that their subject had several voices, depending on interlocutor and circumstance; some sought to minimize the tergiversations of an author's



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philosophical itinerary and give us a synthesis of what the subject's philosophy came to represent (or, in rare cases, should have come to represent) to most readers. That variety enriches this intellectually and disciplinarily diverse project.

Several major contributions deserve special praise: Jean-Luc Solère on Pierre Bayle is a remarkable piece compellingly argued and exemplary in its breadth, depth, and nuanced readings of text, context, and polemics. Antony McKenna's lucid and bountiful essay on religious controversies is a master-class in how knowledge (much of it essential to understanding articles that will follow) can be conveyed efficiently and elegantly. Guido Canziani's article on the »Theophrastus redivivus« is an exceptionally rich and untendentious presentation of this clandestine manuscript, striking in its explications and appropriately cautious in its claims for influence.

In short, a gift.



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