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Editor Luc Foisneau's adventure with this important *Dictionnaire* began in the year 2000. No year could have served better to launch what will be the most useful gift this present century can offer to young readers and specialists of French philosophy, as it was five centuries ago. If this *Dictionnaire* had existed while I was active in studying that period, it would have been among the most treasured and frequently consulted works in my library, and my own writings would have been better-informed as a result.

I will need several rubrics just to outline the main virtues of this *Dictionnaire*.

Approach

It is easy for philosophers today to forget that their 17th century counterparts viewed philosophy differently. Foisneau and his colleagues did not forget. Instead of forcing seventeenth century philosophy into contemporary categories, the *Dictionnaire* works with conceptions dominant in the period under examination. Productive philosophers and famous controversialists of the seventeenth century, in domains including natural philosophy (science) theology, literature, ethics, politics, aesthetics and other matters, are the subjects of the nearly 700 articles of the *Dictionnaire*.

Discretion

The goal is to be representative of 17th century French philosophy, though not every French philosopher of the time can be included, and not all non-French philosophers can be excluded. Foisneau wisely recognized from the outset that there can be no such thing as a list of all and only the French philosophers of the seventeenth century. There are always outliers, and prudent decisions are required in order to determine whether or not to include them.

Mark Duncan (1570-1640) for example, was born in Scotland, but later lived and wrote in France. He merits the short article accorded to him. Pierre Bayle, on the other hand, who is rightly accorded a long article, nevertheless spent a great number of his most productive years in exile.

Thomas Hobbes poses a different problem. Although he published his most famous works during his eleven year sojourn in France, that plainly does not make him a French philosopher. But what about Leibniz? He lived only three years in France, yet a better case could be made for his inclusion than for Hobbes. The brevity of his sojourn in France does not cancel the influence of his thought and writing on French philosophers, including Coste, Basnage de Beauval, Bayle, Arnauld and others. But the editors did the right thing in excluding him. Despite his merits, it would have been preposterous to call Leibniz a French philosopher.

Three great playwrights of the seventeenth century, Racine, Corneille and Molière, are included for the sake of the literary artfulness with which they put philosophy on stage, while Louis XIV figures, not so much for his patronage of literature as because of his opposition to Jansenism, Quietism, and Protestantism, together with his condemnation of allegedly erroneous teachings of Descartes.

Wide Range

The excellent authors of the almost 700 entries in the *Dictionnaire* were not only recruited from France. Philosophers from eight other countries also participated. Contributions not written in French were translated from their original language by the editor, or by other collaborators involved in the project.

Quality

All the articles I consulted were well-constructed, owing not just to the learning of their authors, but also to the prescribed framework to which those authors were asked to adhere. Each article consists of a short bio of the subject, a short list of critical discussions by the subject's contemporaries, followed by a short list of critical discussions of his work by *our* contemporaries. The length of the articles varies according to their subjects' prominence in the debates of their time.

Variety and Geography

If you read all the prefatory pages of volume one, which I highly recommend, you will find not only an account of the measures I have just mentioned, but also a very useful overview of the kinds of philosophy practised in seventeenth century France. Communities of French Cartesians, Scholastic theologians, Libertines, *La pensée clandestine* (Underground philosophy) Scientists, Art theorists, Religious controversialists and The Republic of Letters are all identified. A brief attempt is made at the end to establish places where these philosophers tended to be found.

Just One Disappointment

It is regrettable that this excellent undertaking presents itself in the form of two cheaply-produced paperbacks, each over 1000 pages long. Some may find this sufficient, but such an important, well-conceived labour of love ought also to be offered, at least to collectors, in six to eight fine leather-bound volumes, with pages wide enough for readers' notes. I realize this would be expensive.

As things stand, this *Dictionnaire* can be judged neither by its cover nor by its material pages. But its words are wonderful.

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