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Patricia Touboul, Laurence Devillairs, and Alberto Frigo, eds. *Fénelon et Port-Royal*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. 220 pp. €31.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-05824-3.

Review by Jotham Parsons, Duquesne University.

This collection of essays, the fruit of a 2015 *journée d'études*, offers a deep dive into the theological controversies of the turn of the eighteenth century. The disciplinary affiliations of the contributors are mostly with philosophy, and in Anglophone terms the contributions tend towards historical theology, so readers should expect more intense engagement with the details of argumentation than social or political context for the twists and turns of the Jansenist controversy—though that context is not ignored. And as is inevitable with this kind of collective work, there is a certain amount of both repetition and dispersion. With that said, readers comfortable with seventeenth-century Catholic theology will find much of interest here, and they may find themselves reevaluating the importance of some seemingly obscure points.

The subject of this collection is what it says on the tin: the intellectual and sometimes social encounters between the Jansenist movement centered, until its final dispersion in 1709, on the Port-Royal convent(s) and François Fénelon. These seem to have been most intense after his 1698 disgrace, when both his work in his diocese of Cambrai and the hope of at least mitigating that disgrace pushed him toward anti-Jansenist controversy. Of the seven essays in this volume, three deal with the core theological issues of will and grace that are generally taken to define Jansenism, while the other four investigate the broader social, ecclesiological, and religious context of those disputes. It thus makes sense to discuss each of these two groups in turn.

The essays by Sylvio de Franceschi, Hélène Michon, and (jointly) Laurence Devillairs and Patricia Touboul, in fact all orbit around an even more specific philosophical question, namely, how passions and impulses guided or determined the action of the will. This was one of the century's major preoccupations, with implications as far afield as political economy or international relations, so it is certainly no surprise that it loomed large in theological discussions of free will.[1] De Franceschi's essay traces Fénelon's moderately successful attempt to impose a definition of Jansenism as the belief that the will is directed necessarily by its strongest delectation, and that saving grace consists of an invincible delectation of virtue. Whatever its merits as a philosophical analysis, this was meant to provide maximum specificity to the Five Articles, the papal condemnation of which was the foundation of the anti-Jansenist case. If in that case theology was shaped to the needs of polemic, Michon's investigation of *amour naturel* shows how Fénelon's theological commitments—in this case to his doctrine of a mystical *pur amour* whereby God completely remakes the human heart—could place him in an awkward position. His

rejection of an innate and natural love beyond pure self-interest, which could be developed by divine grace, led him to contradict not just Antoine Arnauld, but also François de Sales and, beyond that, even Thomas Aquinas. Finally, Devillairs and Touboul's study of Fénelon's theory of pleasure once again underlines his commitment to a rather radical freedom of the will, which they place in the context as much of early modern philosophy as of theology.

If the remaining essays have a common theme, it is the sociopolitical complexity of the Jansenist controversy. Trémolières, following the same thread as de Franceschi, discusses Fénelon's absolutism around the Five Articles, suggesting that his contention that a formal papal reading of a text was by definition definitive, though it found little traction at the time (it likely raised more problems than it solved), fed into later theories of the magisterium. Frigo believes that Fénelon's mystical theology found support in certain doctrines of Jansenius that had been more or less covertly rejected by Arnauld and Nicole, underlining again the far from monolithic nature of "Jansenism." Moulis and Lesaulnier, finally, use documentary rather than philosophical analysis to clarify Fénelon's concrete relationships with Jansenists. The former concludes that there were probably very few actual Jansenists in the diocese of Cambrai, while the latter details the personal, familial, and intellectual ties that led Fénelon and Racine to collaborate in supporting the young theologian Louis Ellies du Pin in a conflict with Bossuet and other conservatives. The combined impression is that Fénelon may have been notably more sympathetic in his reactions to actually existing Jansenists than to purely theoretical ones.

It is hard to give an overall evaluation of a collection of essays, even one as focused as this. But if these authors do not come to any strong collective conclusion, they do conduct a fascinating collective exploration of a little-known space. In one way it was a small world, with the same highly specialized controversies recycled through theological education and polemic, appearing with infinite variations over generations, and conducted in the restricted circles of court and university. But it was also open to the philosophical revolutions of the century, international in scope, and subject to political and social conjunctures as well as to intellectual debate. Specialists in the thought of Fénelon or the second generation of Jansenists will certainly want to read this book, but it has value for a broader audience. For anybody interested in intellectual history it is always good to be reminded of the very individual intricacies and complexities that make up the lived experience of any given thinker. For that, this book provides a fine case study.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Laurence Devillairs, Alberto Frigo, and Patricia Touboul, "Avant-propos"

Sylvio Hermann de Franceschi, "Le parti moliniste face à l'impossible mise en système de la doctrine janséniste. Le rôle de la notion théologique de délectation victorieuse dans la genèse de l'antijansénisme fénelonien"

François Trémolières, "Qui peut juger du sens d'un texte?"

Alberto Frigo, "L'antimysticisme de Port-Royal et la mystique de Fénelon"

Hélène Michon, "La question de l'amour naturel. Fénelon, François de Sales, Arnauld"

Laurence Devillairs and Patricia Touboul, "Le(s) Plaisir(s): Fénelon et Port-Royal"

Philippe Moulis, “Les Jansénistes de Fénelon de 1708 à 1715, mythe ou réalité?”

Jean Lesaulnier, “Fénelon, Racine et Port-Royal. L’ ‘affaire’ Louis Ellies Du Pin (1692)”

Philippe Selliers, “Conclusions”

NOTE

[1] To take a classic example, Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1977]). More directly relevant is Dale K. van Kley, “Pierre Nicole, Jansenism, and the Morality of Enlightened Self-Interest,” in *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany*, ed. Alan C. Kors and Paul J. Korshin, 69-85 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

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