

Giuliano Gasparri. *Étienne Chauvin (1640-1725) and his Lexicon philosophicum*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2016. ISBN: 978-3-487-15434-3. 267 pp.

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These days, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Huguenot scholar Étienne Chauvin is remembered in two ways. On the one hand, as a philosopher and minister, he was an active member of the contemporary Republic of Letters, one familiar to such luminaries as Pierre Bayle and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. On the other hand, he was the author of the *Lexicon rationale* (1692), an alphabetical encyclopedia of philosophical terms, and a widely used source for encyclopedias of the following century. Up till now, Chauvin and his *Lexicon* have subsisted in intellectual history as parenthetical entities, frequently mentioned but never studied in detail. Giuliano Gasparri fills the gap with his new book, *Étienne Chauvin (1640-1725) and his Lexicon philosophicum*. His is not, Gasparri admits, the definitive book on the subject, for he mostly neglects Chauvin's coverage of the natural sciences (10, 146). To this avowed neglect I would add another, namely that he barely touches on the illustrations at the end of the *Lexicon*, which were novel in a philosophical dictionary, and which anticipated those in John Harris's *Lexicon Technicum* (1704) and Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (1728). Yet despite these two caveats, the book does give a well-rounded picture of the *Lexicon* and its creator. Indeed, according to the index, Gasparri touches on some two hundred of the several thousand articles in *Lexicon*—a respectable sample.

Gasparri's book begins with historical background, information on the *Lexicon's* sources and how they were used, and a biography of Chauvin. Following are seven chapters examining the *Lexicon's* treatment of seven areas of thought: philosophy and the classification of sciences; logic and method; the mind and its faculties; theology; physics; "anthropology" (which was something like modern psychology in Chauvin's interpretation); and ethics and politics. A final chapter deals with the reception of the *Lexicon* and the reappearance of some of its entries in eighteenth- and even nineteenth-century encyclopedias. Although the title page announces that Gasparri's book was translated into English by Federico Poole, this is in fact the first and for the moment only edition of the study. Occasionally the book's English is awkward, as in the regular use of the phrase "under this respect" for "in this respect." The vocabulary is also arcane on occasion—for example, with the terms "chrestomathy" (10) and "factice"

(109). Given the decision to appeal to a wide audience with the translation into English, I would have preferred to see more translations of the many quotations in Latin. Overall, however, the English is clear and easy to read.

Étienne Chauvin was born in France, but upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he went into exile, first in Rotterdam and then in Berlin, both hubs for the contemporary Huguenot diaspora. To support himself and eventually his wife and children, he worked as a minister, a journalist, and a teacher of philosophy at the French College of Berlin. Alongside these professional activities, he found time to do scientific research—authoring, for example, a paper on evaporation (146-47) and perhaps devising a system for stuffing animals (24*n*). His mechanical ingenuity was such that when he proved too old to set up an air-pump delivered to the Berlin Academy of Sciences for his experiments, an outsider had to be brought in to get it working (42).

Chauvin published the *Lexicon rationale* in his 50s, and then, in his 70s, issued a revised edition (1713) under the title *Lexicon philosophicum*. The *Lexicon* has long been seen as the first “modern” philosophical dictionary. Gasparri repeatedly compares it to the previous philosophical dictionaries of Rudolph Goclenius (1613) and Johannes Micraelius (1653), both much more comfortably anchored in scholastic philosophy. Étienne’s *Lexicon*, by contrast, brought in modern philosophers, notably René Descartes and his disciples. Indeed, an enduring characterization of Chauvin and his *Lexicon* is that both were “Cartesian.” Gasparri argues persuasively that this is an overstatement. To begin with, he observes, tags like “Cartesian” are no longer considered as valid as they once were. To call someone a Cartesian (or a Newtonian, a vitalist, et cetera) is only to begin the process of understanding their thinking. Chauvin, not surprisingly, turns out to have had much in common with Descartes but also to have diverged from him in crucial respects—for example, in inclining toward acceptance of the vacuum. Just as importantly, one of the themes of Gasparri’s book is that Chauvin’s intellectual temperament was both conciliatory and eclectic. In other words, he was eager to preserve continuity in the history of philosophy, notably by relating Cartesian ideas to older and newer ones. Unlike Descartes, for instance, he did not see philosophical doubt as constituting a break with a past. Instead, he assimilated it to a form of perplexity mentioned by Aristotle (87-91). Lastly, Gasparri maintains, Chauvin was more empirical than Descartes from the beginning, and he became progressively more so in the years separating the first and second editions of the *Lexicon*.

The bulk of Gasparri’s portrait of Chauvin the intellectual derives from the contents of the two editions of the *Lexicon*, which he regularly supplements with material from Chauvin’s lectures between the editions. At times, Gasparri doubts that the *Lexicon* is coherent enough to support inferences about Chauvin’s thinking: “As with other subjects, in dealing with the theme of memory Chauvin inherits all the oscillations of his sources, whether Cartesian, Aristotelian, or empiricist; the various entities in the *Lexicon* ... related to this theme can hardly be recomposed into a single consistent discourse” (125). In fact, Chauvin, like nearly all encyclopedists of the day,

copied much of his encyclopedia from other sources. One of his favorite ones, as established by Gasparri, was the *Institutio philosophiae* (1674) of the Cartesian philosopher Pierre Cally. Yet despite all his copying, Chauvin regularly made small changes to borrowed material, demonstrating his commitment to expressing his own point of view (10, 178-79). The fact that Gasparri is assiduous in identifying sources for articles allows him to catch glimpses of Chauvin at work, reading and modifying texts by his peers.

At times, Chauvin was polemical. He denounced the Aristotelian conception of movement as silly, for example, and he called astrologists charlatans (160, 174-75). Yet he did not shirk from covering ideas he disagreed with, as the future encyclopedist Jean Leclerc observed in a review (225). On at least subjects, he was more impartial in his encyclopedia than he was in his teaching (153-54, 158-59). In another way too, it would seem that he saw encyclopedia-writing as having its own set of rules, for he declined to cite sources throughout the *Lexicon*—to the annoyance of Leclerc (7, 11, 225). One might argue that this was a procedure for exaggerating the scale of his research, but it was probably, above all, a means of establishing intellectual authority by distancing knowledge from specific individuals.

Besides comparing the *Lexicon*'s articles to the texts they were taken from, Gasparri compares them in the first and second editions, pointing out evolution in Chauvin's thinking as well as his incorporation of new material, notably on law and the natural sciences (17-18). Then he shows how Chauvin's articles had an afterlife in subsequent encyclopedias. One of the more important links in the chain of transmission was Johann Georg Walch's *Philosophisches Lexicon* (1726), which often cited and quoted from Chauvin's *Lexicon*. Soon afterward, much of the *Philosophisches Lexicon* was rolled into the much larger *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (1732-50). But Chauvin was also a source for Harris's *Lexicon Technicum* and Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*. Through their mediation, some of Chauvin's articles reappeared in the *Encyclopédie* (1751-72) and later British encyclopedias. Paradoxically, encyclopedists were now turning to Chauvin as an expert on scholastic philosophy, not for the "modern" philosophy he had been keen to showcase (234-35).

In conclusion, *Étienne Chauvin (1640-1725) and his Lexicon philosophicum* is a well-organized book on a deserving subject. Gasparri is for the most part an able communicator, bringing clarity and interest to the myriad debates into which Chauvin and his *Lexicon* entered. He has made an important contribution to scholarship.