

tension is inherent in his analysis). He alternates so often between the terms *dream* and *logic*, however, that his overarching claims about the dream itself and the import of his otherwise masterful readings are obscured at times. Early modern French political theorists claimed that royal sovereignty was subject to reason. One wonders if Bjørnstad could reconcile his rich ideas through additional definition of the early modern understanding of reason and logic as much as the dream paradigm.

Finally, Bjørnstad uses the admittedly fraught designation *absolutism* throughout the text as the collective object of Louis XIV's and his subjects' dream. The political nomenclature of absolute monarchy or absolutism did not yet exist as such in the seventeenth century, and it becomes apparent that Bjørnstad's project is not actually about absolutism. It seems that Bjørnstad employs this more familiar category for the sake of his readers, but he is instead adeptly articulating for his skeptical, modern audience the complex (il)logic on which rested the paradoxical-cum-ineffable, though insecure, foundations of French divine right kingship ineluctably comprising royal exemplarity and its imperative toward *Gloire*. With these slight considerations in mind, this book is of great importance for scholars and students invested in the reign of Louis XIV and early modern history and ideas, and it serves as a model of close textual analysis.

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Toward an Equality of the Sexes in Early Modern France. Derval Conroy, ed.
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Routledge, 2021. xii + 240 pp. \$160.

This anthology addresses the central question of gender equality as it developed in seventeenth-century France. The essays cover the topic as it appeared in philosophy and as it operated de facto in religious practice, professional life, and society. In the first essays, the reader encounters Poulain de la Barre and his 1673 work *De l'égalité des deux sexes*. Fraisse relates that Poulain considered the prejudice against women as the ultimate prejudice, and therefore relevant to discussions of other inequalities. Pellegrin and Wilkin relate Poulain's work to Cartesian ideas.

Descartes did not address gender equality, but his critique of prejudice and his concept of the mind/body split allowed an intellectual space for thinking about the mind as ungendered. How would this abstract concept of equality play out in the real world in a public riddled with its own prejudices? How could one include women in a community of scholars when they had no access to formal education? One potential solution, according to Devicenzo's study of Marie le Jars de Gournay, was the creation of a new social space—the salon—that allowed women to participate as equals in scholarly discussion.

Three essays provide examples of gender equality in politics and religion. Conroy asserts that in the realm of politics, female rulers claimed equality with their male counterparts through the language of virtue ethics. Keller-Lapp relates how Ursulines participated in missions comparable in aim and intent to those conducted by male Jesuits. At the same time, Baxter's essay shows how the nuns of Port-Royal upheld their beliefs against the force of absolutist rule.

Women often participated as equals in the concrete world of artistic and literary production. Clark's essay looks at women taking an active role in theater companies, and Keller-Rahbé points out that women had the right of access to print and literary property. A particularly touching essay by Goldsmith looks at friendship as an equal partnership as practiced by Hortense Mancini and Saint-Evremond. She describes the French conversations of their literary circle in London as a collective performance and outpost of French civilization.

The final essay by Stuurman brings these studies into a wider perspective as he compares ideas of gender equality in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France to Qing China. He argues that the destruction of the ideal of absolute and timeless consensus in the Enlightenment opened up space to imagine equality of the sexes in a way that adherence to Confucianism would never allow. His essay links the destabilized gender regime of Europe to global expansion. As a more linear view of history emerged in the eighteenth century, scholars viewed the emancipation of women as progress. Convinced of their position at the highest and last stage of history, the French considered gender equality as a part of their national identity as well as their civilizing mission around the world.

The anthology succeeds in situating the question of gender equality at the heart of early modern philosophy, religion, and society. The use of the word *toward* is somewhat jarring, as it implies a steady motion leading to gender equality. While equality of the sexes continues to seem elusive, the book clearly shows that women gained ground in France between 1600 and 1700. Admittedly, the early seventeenth century is a low bar, as men were still burning women as witches at that time. By the end of the century, elite men and women were increasingly likely to engage in friendly and philosophical banter as equals. The book does not address women's standing in law, which makes many of the essays seem like vignettes of early modern France. Nevertheless, taken together, this book proves that certain concepts, ideas, and situations were fertile ground for the sprouts of equality to grow.

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