



*Fate and Fortune in European Thought, ca. 1400–1650.* Ovanes Akopyan, ed. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 327. Leiden: Brill, 2021. xii + 288 pp. \$139.

---

Who reigns and what consoles? *Fatum*, *Fortuna*, or *providentia dei*? Prominent classical authors such as Cicero, Seneca, and Boethius influenced early modern politicians, humanists, and theologians to write consolatory letters to mourning friends with the intention to publish. These Renaissance authors were normally as well versed in the Christian theological tradition as in Greek philosophy. This volume comprises ten contributions on this theme. They differ in kind, focusing on either texts, art, or daily life. The authors surely deliver a valuable panorama of themes and perspectives on the subject.

In the first chapter John Sellars presents to us remedies for fate and fortune, variously concocted from Greek philosophical schools by six well-known Renaissance philosophers: Petrarch, Salutati, Bracciolini, Filelfo, Scala, and Ficino. Sellars shows that these texts were neither theoretical exercises nor displays, but firmly rooted in a fragile reality.

In Richard Blum's chapter, "Coluccio Salutati and the Humanist Critique of Fate," we are invited to a rewarding interpretation of the treatise *De fato et fortuna*, published in 1396. "Human concerns and history . . . are the features of the humanist engagement with philosophy," writes Blum, and for Salutati vice and not fate causes suffering. In the world view of Salutati, God was supreme in weaving necessity and contingency together. Interpreting Saint Paul, the Florentine chancellor contended that we as humans have our freedom of volition at the same time as God works in us.

In an exciting chapter, Elisabeth Blum draws attention to the contradictory use of the fatalistic deities in the work *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* by Giordano Bruno. But Bruno's answer is that there is no answer and *Fortuna* reigns supreme. Jo Coture promisingly handles the theme in the philosophy of Pierre Gassendi, who renovated Epicurean physics and, according to Coture, made atomism compatible with Christian providence and necessity with human freedom. Guido Giglioni treats fatalism in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, arguing that Hippocratic and Galenic ideas on cyclical life were basic assumptions for the Florentine. In the only chapter that focuses on poetry, Orlando Reade argues that the early modern association of women with *Fortuna*, the goddess of coincidences, has delivered "a logic of gender difference" to our own time and culture. Sophie Raux writes a relevant and informative contribution about the influence widespread gaming with lottery in the Low Countries had on concepts like fate and fortune.

Three artistic contributions give the theme even more life and visibility. Damiano Acciarino, in her "Renaissance Iconology of Fate," illustrates her texts with fascinating paintings that identify fate with death, a star, and a chain. In Dalia Judovitz's chapter, the paintings by Georges de La Tour are interpreted with the theological framework of

Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, in which the bishop explains the fortunes and misfortunes in life with a divine hidden order behind it all. Finally, Ovanes Akopyan writes about “the adaptation and use of Western elements, particularly astrological, in two Russian icons ascribed to Simon Ushakov,” who was the most influential icon painter in Russia during the seventeenth century. It turns out, though, in an exciting but conjectural conclusion, that the paintings were probably made in the early eighteenth century in a Russian anti-astrological context.

Hopefully this short note about the book will stir interest in it. A few critical points might, however, be in order. First, ought it not to be a *sine qua non* in our common enterprise of doing early modern research to indicate when something stated or interpreted differs from earlier research? In such important cases, at least, there should be full quotations from the sources, so the news can be checked. Now some chapters are more like textbook chapters than research articles. Second, the textual sources contain both philosophical and theological arguments, since in dialogues or correspondences like these there were no sharp distinctions between these two realms of knowledge. Nevertheless, we can observe a strictly philosophical approach to Salutati in one chapter compared with another one that takes Salutati’s theological concerns seriously. At last, in an inadequate footnote by Reade, controversial statements are said to be based on Jordan Petersen. A check of the referred page, delivered by a young reader of the modern psychologist, shows that Petersen himself had a different take on the issue.

Per Landgren, *Wolfson College, University of Oxford*  
doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.267

*Collective Understanding, Radicalism, and Literary History, 1645–1742.*  
Melissa Mowry.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. x + 250 pp. \$80.

---

Melissa Mowry’s book argues that the Levellers, the radical political protesters active during the English Civil War, formulated an idea of collective living that mainstream British culture anxiously suppressed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The book is relatively short, and it has a lot of ground to cover. It aims for conciseness by focusing on a handful of representative authors. To picture Leveller thinking, it profiles the legal troubles and the publications of two controversial Leveller couples: John and Elizabeth Lilburne, and Richard and Mary Overton. In their pamphlets and in their petitions to the government, and then again in the mutual support they gave one another and their community, the Lilburnes and Overtons repudiated sovereignty as a principle of social order and preferred collective cooperation instead. To depict the repression of the collectivist culture they envisioned, Mowry