

Depuis chaque nouvelle édition a bénéficié de nombreuses rectifications. Revu par les membres et correspondants de la Société française de philosophie ce texte est publié avec leurs corrections et observations. Il n'est pas question pourtant de présenter aux lecteurs un ouvrage complètement remanié. "Cette nouvelle édition," nous dit René Poirier dans la préface, "se contente d'élagages, de remaniements, de mises au point de détail. Le Supplément et l'Appendice ont été fondus ensemble et enrichis d'un certain nombre de termes nouveaux, annoncés dans le corps de l'ouvrage, auquel ils seront ultérieurement intégrés."

Ce Supplément (50 pages) contient des articles nouveaux, des compléments à des articles figurant déjà dans le corps du Vocabulaire; des observations nouvelles sur ces articles. De plus, il est suivi de la traduction de tous les textes grecs ou latins cités dans le Vocabulaire. Mais ce qui fait une des richesses de cet ouvrage et qui explique en partie son endurance sont les nombreuses explications et citations données en bas de page (souvent avec la mention A.L.).

Aucune bibliothèque personnelle ou publique ne devrait être privée de cette oeuvre remarquable et essentielle à la recherche philosophique.

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**VOLTAIRE SELECTIONS.** Edited by Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1989. ISBN 0-02-331610-1. 242 Pp.

Edited, with introduction, notes and bibliography by Paul Edwards, is a book of selections of Voltaire's works. Included are the nine chapters of the *Treatise on metaphysics* (1736) available for the first time in English; the *Treatise on Toleration* (1764); several essays from the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764); some questions concerning the *Encyclopedia* (1770-1772) and, of course, numerous letters, as well as some assorted writings.

Let us face it. Edwards is a brilliant philosopher and his advocated aim in this book is to show that Voltaire was also a bonafide

philosopher,--not just the 18th-century interpretation of a "philosophe." Edwards actually succeeds, if we forget one thing about Voltaire, rightfully pointed out by Edwards himself, namely that "perhaps nobody before or since has been so successful at demolishing opposing positions by laughing them out of existence" (p.ix). Indeed, no one could argue with this statement; trouble is that Voltaire did not rebuilt anything; he did not construct any viable system; he did offer constructive alternatives to the edifices he so effectively destroyed.

The introduction, states the editor, "gives a fairly detailed account of the highlights of Voltaire's extremely eventful life" (vii). Here again the choice is meaningful and it is what is not said that changes some of the interpretation. Why, for instance, not acknowledge the debt owed by Voltaire to Madame du Châtelet who is simply referred to as "his learned mistress" (p.4). Thus demeaning "the divine Emily" who is demoted a notch by simply being a pastime rather than the efficient teacher that she was to Voltaire who learned to appreciate and understand Newtonian physics from her; and let us not forget that she is the "mistress" who translated Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* into French and that her translation, which demanded an unusual familiarity, not only with latin, but with physics as well, is still the only one available (reprinted in 1969) in France today. Voltaire did not write the *Lettres philosophiques* upon returning to France (p.3), but wrote them between 1726 and 1729, and first published them in England; this is why they are generally best known as "*Les Lettres anglaises*"; and in these letters he writes an essay on Locke which has been, and still is, considered not an attack on Locke but very much a defense of his system, as opposed to the system put forth by Descartes: "tant de raisonneurs ayant fait le roman de l'âme, enfin un sage est venu qui en a fait modestement l'histoire," wrote Voltaire. *La Henriade* was first published in 1723, under the title *La Ligue ou Henri le Grand*; it was Voltaire's intention and ambition to write the most glorious and greatest epic in the French language, but he miserably failed on that score; the greatest epic in the French language is still the *Chanson de Roland*; *La Henriade* has only a relative value, mainly because of the spirit of religious tolerance advocated by the author. It is also a well-known fact that Voltaire was considered a champion, the defensor of the downtrodden, taking arms

in defense of the unjustly accused, but this is not the case for the Chevalier de La Barre who was ably defended by Condorcet; Voltaire, in the case of the unfortunate young man, not only did not take up arms again but wrote Condorcet: "Faire revoir hardiment au conseil le procès de La Barre serait une chose digne du beau siècle où nous entrons... C'est à moi de me taire, de me cacher, et à vous d'agir, suivant la bonne pensée qui vous est venue." As for Voltaire, far from taking up the cause of La Barre, and of his friend d'Etallonde, he wrote cautious commentaries about "the act of madness" of this "young madman" (Letter 12503, dated 1 July 1766, from Voltaire to D'Alembert); about their "public profanations" to the Marquis d'Argence (Letter 12504, dated 1 July 1766); about "these two maniacs who have profaned a church in Picardy" (Letter 12505, dated 1 July 1766, to Etienne Noël Damilville). In this case, posterity has been very unkind to Condorcet who, ignoring all danger, wrote a moving letter to the French Parliament.

Let us not quarrel with Mr. Edwards; he does say in the same introduction that "several of Voltaire's arguments are so glaringly invalid that they can be disposed of in a few words" (p.31); yet, if he would have us believe that Voltaire could make the grade as a philosopher, on the same plane say, as Hume or Spinoza, then he most certainly fails; on the other hand, if anyone could convince the american reader of the worth of Voltaire's philosophical writings then, certainly no one could have done a better job than the one attempted by M. Edwards; the topic chosen are all labeled appropriately; the translations are irreproachable in spite of some occasional curious choices; why, for instance, translate the "Traité sur la tolérance" as A Treatise on Toleration,(as was done in 1935 by Joseph McCabe) when the English word "tolerance" is altogether correct? The selections emphasized the fact that Voltaire was really a "touche-à-tout," a jack of all trades, perhaps because he lived so long and had time, helped with four secretaries, to write down much of his thoughts.

The annotated bibliography (pp. 231-242), appended to the book, is invaluable and will certainly be a bonanza to students and to Voltaire's fans. Reading Mr. Edwards' *Selections* of Voltaire's works, one is reminded that the eighteenth-century was named fittingly enough Voltaire's Century, "Le Siècle de Voltaire." By the choices made and the

variety of the selections spanning four decades (1733-1772), Edwards has successfully demonstrated the truth of this statement. Anyone wishing to get acquainted with the spirit of the French Enlightenment will find *Voltaire. Selections* a welcome addition to the body of works on this important epoch of history and philosophy.

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**RUFFET, JEAN.** *Kleist en prison.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991, 110 pp. ISBN 2-7384-0934-2.

Premier titre d'une nouvelle collection "La Philosophie en commun", dirigée par Stéphane Douailler, Jacques Poulain et Patrice Vermeren, l'ouvrage intitulé *Kleist en prison*, de Jean Ruffet, vient de paraître aux Editions L'Harmattan.

Né en Allemagne (1777-1811), Heinrich von Kleist est l'auteur de nombreux ouvrages; en particulier, *Amphitryon* (1807) une pièce qui rappelle celle de Molière mais avec des éléments philosophiques qui changent la personnalité de Jupiter et rendent le dénouement plus grandiose que chez Molière. *La Cruche cassée* (1803), une des meilleures comédies de l'auteur, s'inspire du tableau de Creuze du même titre. La question posée est de savoir si nous avons chacun le droit de juger les autres étant nous-mêmes à la merci des mêmes tentations et que nous pouvons un jour perpétrer les mêmes fautes dont nous sommes aujourd'hui les accusés. Kleist a également écrit plusieurs recueils de nouvelles dont la plus longue et la plus importante, *L'histoire de Michel Kohlhaus*, paraissait en 1808; *La marquise d'O*, une autre nouvelle, fut publié en 1810. Ecrite dans un style réminiscent de Boccace, on dégage de l'oeuvre de Kleist une vision pessimiste du mal.

Dans le livre de Jean Ruffet, l'auteur Kleist et deux de ses compagnons, Gauvain et Ehrenberg, deviennent les protagonistes d'une biographie en forme de récit. Dès le lendemain de son arrivée à Berlin,