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Alain Boureau must be counted among the most important and influential people studying scholasticism. Director of studies at *l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales* and director of the 'Groupe d'anthropologie scolastique' at the *Centre de recherches historiques* there, co-director of the 'Histoire' and 'Bibliothèque scolastique' collections with the publisher *Belles Lettres*, he has published prolifically on the big names of scholastic philosophy: Aquinas and Bonaventure, John Peckham, Peter John Olivi and Richard of Mediavilla, and provided editions of Olivi's Bible commentary and Mediavilla's and Olivi's questions on demons. Nevertheless, his impact in the English speaking world has been rather muted, though other writers in French, German and Italian on similar themes may be even less well known. A handful of his books have been translated.(1) Many others, particularly, his trilogy on the history of scholastic reasoning, have not, as far as I can see, been reviewed by English-language journals. The reason for this lack of uptake may be our own insularity but could also be put down to his very personal style. He is playful, digressive and even auto-biographical in his discussions of medieval thought and it is not always easy to detect a line of argument. Boureau has described his early books (including *Le Droit de cuissage* and *La Papesse Jeanne*) as attempts to deconstruct medieval myths and show the different meanings they took on at different moments.(2) In more recent years, his big battle is against an idealized notion of scholasticism as a cloistered and abstracted pursuit of reason. He fights on several fronts, proposing instead a picture of scholasticism both engaged in institutional rivalries and secular politics, busy with real-world problems and grappling with universal questions of anthropology and human experience. This in itself is not new but Boureau has developed several truly original avenues of thought. Most recently and distinctively, he has argued for reading scholasticism as psychoanalysis. (Boureau serves in the publishing committee of the journal of psychoanalysis *Penser/rêver*). Part of his claim is that the most abstruse seeming scholastic questions should best be understood as attempts to make sense of basic aspects of human experience: our place in the world, the relationship of the individual to a collective identity etc. When Bonaventure answered the question whether celestial bodies have a left and right, this should not be taken in the spirit of counting angels on the head of a pin, but an attempt to understand the subjectivity of these most basic points of reference in human life.(3) In effect, he contends, the medieval philosophers were only articulating basic relations and concepts that psychoanalysis would study again in the 20th century. The scholastic soul and the Freudian psyche, if not one and the same, bear a close analogy.

In his most ambitious books, Boureau argues that some of the most potent ideas of the early modern and modern West were forged in the fire of scholastic enquiry into human condition. *Satan the Heretic* argues that the birth of Western demonology, the ancestry of the *Malus maleficarum*, lies in the 13th century. Philosophers were interested in pacts, human will and the susceptibility of bodies to be inhabited by demons. Barring John XXII's isolated inquisition, it was only a 100 years later that the

ideas became popularised and incendiary. In *La Religion de l'État*, he argues that the origin of the modern notion of nation-state was in essence formed by theologians between 1250 and 1350, and not only in the later wars of religion as modernists like Kosellek claim. Again the precocious medieval formulation of concepts was an accidental consequence of theological discussions about man in general: his nobility, his community in original sin, his place in this world.(4) A theme of many of Boureau's books is the way in which theologians used arguments about free will and human nature as a counter in mendicant rivalries. His interest is in how questions of universal significance formed the drumbeat of these heated institutional conflicts.

Boureau disrupts the tendency (the Cambridge history of Medieval philosophy has been accused of this) to read scholasticism as a set of arguments in a vacuum. Most surprisingly, he calls attention to moments where the unconscious intrudes rudely onto the page. The scribe who copied Mediavilla's question on *fascinatio* substituted in error the word *fascinus* (which means phallus) causing an entirely different textual history from the one Mediavilla had intended.(5) For Boureau these biographical and accidental elements of the text are no less relevant to understanding the philosophy than what the author intended.

Boureau's way of writing reflects this very personalised interest in his texts: he tends not to offer a broad introduction to the subjects of his books, but microscopic close-readings of a few passages. He favours not exemplary texts, but unusual and incongruous ones (what he calls *cas-limites*), and shows how they touch on larger subjects – a kind of microhistory of philosophy. Boureau is interested in the interior life of his authors; these are attempts to describe a thought process, or mode of thought. He compares the historian both to the psychoanalyst and to the anthropologist engaged in participant observation.(6) He writes a history of thinking subjects first, rather than a teleological history of concepts. In his hands, scholastic texts are revealed to be incidental, opportunistic, disparate. Not only does he detect the personality and little neuroses of his authors, but Boureau also reconstitutes the chronological and institutional context of these writings along with the little digs and commentaries that crowd them.

*Le Désir dicté* can best be understood within these larger Boureauian themes. He says in his introduction that he intends to build on a series of workshops on the vow that were held at the *Centre de recherches historiques*. The two edited collections of papers from this conference (7), along with James Brundage's discussion of crusader vows (8) and some works on individual theologians (9), have already provided reliable introductions to the formation of a theology and canon law of vows. Boureau chooses to tell an alternative story, selecting a stimulating series of texts and authors. The *fil conducteur* is a tension inherent in the concept of vow. On the one hand, someone who makes a vow is an individual expressing their own power over their word and desire. A vow takes place only between the person vowing and a supernatural power and is a free act, a performative locution. On the other, vows often take place in an institutional setting, involving entry into a normative order

(monastic vows or vows to go on crusade). Are vows subject to institutional control, or do they really allow an individual to act on their own desires? For Boureau, these two alternatives were locked in a zero sum game, which was played out between mendicants and seculars, among spiritual Franciscans and in papal judgments of the thirteenth century. Like many of his works, it is a story of thought about movements of the internal soul which turned out to have institutional consequences. Boureau first handles the early formation of the concept. In the Acts of the Apostles, the vow appears as a Jewish observance, associated with ritual purity, and therefore, for later Christians, of ambiguous merit. The vow involves giving up wine, and refusing to cut hair, and Boureau (comparing this to the story of Samson) reads a sexual and magical undercurrent in these details of the Biblical narrative. Later scholastics perceived the danger of the Biblical precedent and explicitly excluded all magical and idolatrous vows from their definition. Augustine construed vows as a debt, and his word for debtor 'reus' was itself troubling, meaning both the guilty, those under an obligation and the accused. The choice of word introduced a long-running ambiguity between the vow as legal institution and act of faith. Other referents for the vow included the legal language of vows and oaths, and from the 12th century, the language of sacrament. In chapter two, Boureau shows how a fixed convention about vows appeared in the 12th century. He tracks how definitions of the vow went from 'a willing promise' according to Hugh of Saint Victor and Peter Lombard to a 'conception of a better good confirmed by deliberation of the mind' according to Simon of Bisignano. The concepts of private and public, solemn and simple vows were set in place. Casuistry concerning vows was brought to the mainstream of theological discussion in the hands of William of Auxerre and Hugh of Saint Cher. (It is not really accurate to talk about the 'Entry of the vow into casuistry' in the hands of Hugh of Saint Cher (p. 57): Peter the Chanter and Robert of Courson were the first to write extensive cases of conscience on dispensation from vows, although they have hardly been studied from this point of view.)

Chapter three first appeared as an article in *Annales* (10), and discusses papal judgements on vows. Contrary to the current fashion for treating papal government as a largely responsive one, he considers the decretals as expressions of coherent and conscious thought. Alexander III, Innocent III, Honorius III and Gregory IX claimed increasing rights to offer dispensations to commute or even cancel vows in their decretals. This power, which Boureau calls 'the public management of debts' (p. 104), constitutes in his eyes a centralisation and imposition of hierarchy on what had been an individual act.

Chapters four to six turn back to theology. Boureau offers a description of a series of focused discussions of the vow; its definition (chapter four), the rules surrounding whether children can enter orders (chapter five) and the role of the individual will in vows (chapter six). Under whose power do vows fall? Boureau shows how in their definitions of the vow, Albertus Magnus and Bonaventure chose language which played down the institutional, universal nature of vows (as a sacrament, as a

compulsory part of baptism) and emphasised that vows were a choice based on individual will. In so doing they laid the ground for later arguments about the mendicant vow. Hostiensis discussed at length the Pope's power to dispense with vows. He decided that the Pope could dispense monastic vows, although only if it was of spiritual utility. He located the vow within the bracket of positive law. Aquinas saw the vow as an act of reason, not inherently tied to external words, and not primarily a legal institution. Boureau states that these are the first steps by which the vow ceased to be purely a legal matter, and became a political argument about mendicants.

The way the argument played out is described in the following chapter on whether it is licit for children to swear an oath to enter a monastery. Peckham's secular opponent used language which condemned all vows of adolescents and (in the legal parlance of the day) children capable of fraud as an illegitimate obligation and cause of sin. Peckham, on the side of the friars minor, stated that as soon as a child was capable of choosing good or evil, of making a contract with the devil, he was capable of making a vow to enter religious orders. Aquinas fell diplomatically between the two extremes. Boureau presents the controversy as a fight over the legal versus individual status of the vow, with Peckham on the absolute right of the individual over his salvation, and Gerald of Abbéville the importance of normative systems. On this micro level, their arguments reflect the battle-lines of the larger controversy.

The final chapter compares Olivi's discussion of the evangelical vow with Henry of Gent's discussion of monastic vows in general. Where Olivi denies that the pope can dispense or commute an evangelical vow (although he can offer dispensations for other vows), Henry of Ghent saw the obligation of vows as conditional on ecclesiastical statute and rational statute and law. Where Olivi made a bid for the individual's sovereignty over his own vows and salvation, for Henry of Ghent, the religious vow is integrated into a larger ecclesiastical order.

These last three chapters are in many ways the meat of the book: they show the ultimate significance of the variety of 12th-century definitions of the vow which are described earlier. Throughout the first half of the book, Boureau shows how details in the early history of the vow (its association with danger of sin, the early casuistry of dispensation) foretell the mendicant controversies, the highpoint of medieval thought about vows. Nevertheless, in addition to his insightful discussion of Peckham's quodlibets, it would have been useful if Boureau had included some additional texts to demonstrate the points he wants to make. He gives a thorough account of Peckham and Gerald of Abbeville's disagreement over children entering religious orders. Neither author is writing about vows in general but only those of children under the age of 14. Boureau invites us to compare Peckham and Gerald's views of institutional authority and individual will with those of Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure and Aquinas in the previous chapter and Olivi and Henry of Ghent in the following, presenting them as a series of 'mendicant' arguments about vows that developed over time. It would be interesting to hear more about how children's vows fits into their thought about

vows in general. Peckham certainly states forcefully that the will of the child's will constitutes a real vow, but there is no indication about what he thought about the Pope's right to dispense with vows or about sacramental vows. Peckham may have believed that there were 'two laws in permanent opposition, renewed by a series of contracts: a law of this world and the devil and a law of grace on the other', (p. 150) with the vow only subject to the latter, but it would have been helpful to hear from texts where Peckham speaks about vows in general.

The title, '*Le Désir Dicté*', indicates a book on scholastic thought as psychoanalysis. In his introduction, Boureau says that the vow answers a fundamental psychoanalytic problem, how to put an internal movement into words. He further proposes the vow as a window onto essential problems that affected the whole medieval period from Augustine to Martin Luther; can a priestly class establish itself separately from society? Should differentiation in the church be accepted, fought or favoured? Should a common religious enterprise, like a crusade, be prioritised at the expense of individual and communal claims? In fact, there is little discussion of desire, or of the formulation of desires into words. What Boureau is really interested in is whether scholastic philosophers thought that the will of the person making the vow should be acknowledged as an essential part of the vow. This is still an interesting and significant debate in itself. Likewise, the question whether it is right that monks should make a vow, or that laypeople make a crusading vow, never really arises in the book. The papal decisions that Boureau analyses in chapter three, and the mendicant discussions do not question the fundamental right to make an oath. They are concerned with details of jurisdiction, differentiating the different kinds of oath, and the rules that apply to each.

It is regrettable that Boureau's footnotes often only quote the Latin of his sources without quoting the edition, chapter or page number. This is especially problematic when a key source (Bonaventure's commentary on the fourth book of the Sentences) has also been omitted from the bibliography. It is also a shame that the publishers choose only to include an index of proper names.

Boureau has provided a book that sheds new light on the early formulation of the definition of the vow, and valuable presentations of key aspects of scholastic controversy over Franciscan and Dominican vows. His discussion certainly brings out his authors' ability to reinterpret and nuance a fixed set of definitions of the vow with ingenuity and subtlety. It would have been interesting to hear more on scholastic discussions of the vow as spoken desire, and it is to be hoped that Boureau returns to the subject in future. In *En Somme*, Boureau gave some indication of how that argument would go in his fascinating account of Thomas Aquinas's chapter on vows in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. Boureau suggests that Aquinas's discussion of a case of conscience in which a man has sworn marriage vows to two women surprisingly harsh. He puts it down to Thomas's concerns about his father's supposed rejection of his second wife out of guilt for leaving the first, and his doubts about the validity of his mother and father's marriage.(11) Personal concerns about the

scandal arising from breaking a marriage vow erupt into the philosophical discussion. Very little of that kind of irreverent and unexpected reading of scholastic texts appears here. Nevertheless, this is a serious discussion of an important medieval institution that has not yet received a book-long study. Fans of Boureau may not regard this as one of his most characteristic offerings, but it is a learned and significant contribution to the history of scholastic thought and medieval institutions.

## Notes

1. *The Lord's First Night: the Myth of the droit de cuissage*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago and London, 1998); *The Myth of Pope Joan*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago and London, 2001); *Satan the Heretic: the Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago and London 2006).

2. Martine Robert, 'Entretien avec Alain Boureau', *Le Philosophoire*, 19 (2003.1), 39–62 at 49.

3. *En Somme. Pour un usage analytique de la scolastique medievale* (Verdier, 2011), pp.14–15.

4. *La Religion de L'État. La onstruction de la République étatique dans le discours théologique de l'Occident médiéval (1250–1350)* (Paris, 2006).

5. Questions disputées *quomodo Historiam scribere*', *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques*, 6 (2010), paragraph 12.

6. *En Somme*, pp. 28–32.

7. Published in *Cahiers du CRH*, 16 and 21 (1996 and 1998).

8. James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* (Madison and London, 1969).

9. David Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: the Origins of the Usus Pauper Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA, 1989); Louis Misserey, O.P., 'Contribution à l'histoire du vœu solennel', in *Mélanges Thomistes publiés par les dominicains de la province de France à l'occasion du VIe centenaire de la canonisation de saint Thomas d'Aquin (18 Juillet 1323)* (Paris, 1934), pp. 141–51.

10. Le vœu la dette et le contrôle pontifical des échanges au début du XIIIe siècle', *Annales HSC* 2012, 417–49.

11. *En Somme*, pp. 42–54.

