

Past Masters Electronic Texts in Philosophy: *Leibniz: Philosophische Schriften*, *Œuvres Complètes de René Descartes*, and *The Continental Rationalists*.

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The InteLex Corporation has been producing its Past Masters databases since 1989 and now boasts the world's largest collection of full-text electronic editions in philosophy. The series includes an impressive array of collected works by major figures from Aristotle to Wittgenstein. In the current review I intend to discuss three of these databases that are of particular interest to Leibniz scholars, *Leibniz: Philosophische Schriften*, *Œuvres Complètes de René Descartes*, and *The Continental Rationalists*, as well as the software that is supplied for navigating these databases. A full list of currently available titles may be obtained from the InteLex web page <http://www.nlx.com>. I shall begin the review by outlining the main features of the software (Folio Views) with which Past Masters databases are accessed. I shall then turn to contents of the individual databases under consideration here, and finish the review with an evaluation of the software and databases as a whole.

Past Masters databases are sold in CD ROM format for use on personal computers. But the databases may also be obtained by university libraries in a format which allows them to be made accessible to multiple users via a network. The current review was written after using the database on a personal computer. However, most of the discussion below will be applicable to both formats.

Those who purchase a Past Masters database may run it directly from their CD ROM or install the software on their hard drive. The databases are quite large (Descartes 49.9 MB; Leibniz 11.6 MB; and Rationalists 7.83 MB), however files of this size will be no problem for recently purchased computers. And, since the databases run more efficiently if they are installed, this method is recommended.

All of the Past Masters databases are accessed through a program called Views, which is produced by the Folio corporation. Views is not designed solely for use with Past Masters and has capabilities that go beyond those required for general use of the InteLex products. Since Views is not tailor made for Past Masters, it is advisable to consult the booklet that InteLex provides when learning how to use the program. These instructions are easier to follow and allow one to avoid the redundant features which are discussed in the online help that comes with Views.

Views has a similar on-screen appearance to common word processing programs such as Microsoft Word and Word Perfect and should prove easy to learn for anyone who is a regular computer user. When a database has been opened the

entire database (e.g., the whole of the *Philosophische Schriften*) appears as a single document, which can be scrolled from beginning to end. Databases contain the divisions that appear in the original works, but, in addition they are broken down into units called “records”, which are usually one paragraph in length. One may navigate the documents easily by clicking on “table of contents” which appears under the “view” menu. This presents a new screen which includes a detailed list of the documents that are contained in the database (e.g., each separate heading in Gerhardt’s *Die philosophischen Schriften*). Clicking on a given content takes the user to that place in the database. The amount of detail that is included in the list may be expanded or contracted, and one’s present position is clearly marked by a blue bar.

Once a database is open it is possible to perform a number of actions with great ease. Text may be captured and copied by clicking and scrolling in the familiar way. However, Views also allows one to “tag” single or multiple records as one moves through a database and then save or print them as a group. Perhaps the most useful feature of Views is its “query” capability. This allows the user to search the database for individual words, word combinations, and phrases. It is possible to search chosen sections of an individual database. However, the easiest way to proceed is to perform general searches, which register hits throughout, and then use the table of contents to navigate to the places that one wishes to investigate. For example, a search for the word “aggregatum” as it appears in the De Volder correspondence would be performed most easily by initiating a query on this term (which would highlight all occurrences in the *Philosophische Schriften*), clicking on the table of contents, and then clicking on the appropriate heading. For more general searches, Views conveniently displays a list of the number of hits next to individual items on the table of contents.

As well as querying individual words and phrases, Views will perform Boolean searches with the inclusion of “and”, “or”, and “not” between words or phrases. These operations range over individual “records”. Thus a conjoined search of “res” and “extensa” would capture all the places within a given database in which these two terms appear in the same record (usually a paragraph). Views also performs “wild card” queries which allow one to search for all words that have a given stem (e.g., *substan** would locate all the words that begin this way) - or to search for words which have a common beginning and ending but different mid-sections (e.g., *f?r* would locate words such as *for*, *far*, and *fir*). Care must be taken to make sure that one’s search takes account of minor differences, such as those of accent in French texts. However, this is facilitated by the fact that Views displays the

word one is currently typing into the “query for” box along with those words that are nearest to it alphabetically. This feature is particularly useful, since words in the query box may be added to the search by clicking on them. The default operation here is the Boolean “or”. Thus, one can search for all the variants of a word like “extensa” disjointly simply by clicking down the list provided.

Finally, Views offers a number of features which allow the user to personalize the databases she uses. However, it should be noted that these are not currently available to users who do not possess the CD ROM version of Past Masters. In order to perform these functions a “shadow file” must be created, since the databases themselves are in a read only format. Shadow files contain only the personalizing information which may accessed later “on top of” the appropriate database. Once a shadow file is created, it becomes possible to highlight text in multiple colors, and to make notes and add bookmarks. These may be recalled and modified at later times. Multiple shadow files may be created, allowing one to create innumerable distinct personalized versions of the same database.

Having presented an overview of the Views software, I want to turn to the three individual databases. *Leibniz: Philosophische Schriften* is IntelLex’s first foray into the original language writings of Leibniz. It is a digital facsimile of the seven volumes of *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, herausgegeben von Carl Immanuel Gerhardt. Berlin Weidmann (1875-1890). The database consists of all the original text, diagrams, footnotes, including Gerhardt’s introductions.

Given that there is no complete edition of Leibniz’s works, we can hardly fault IntelLex for having chosen the most widely used and cited edition the philosophical writings. But, setting aside for the moment the difficulties which beset the Gerhardt edition, Leibniz scholars may feel justifiably disappointed at the breadth of coverage that this offers, especially when this is compared to the databases that IntelLex has produced of the writings of other philosophers, such as Augustine, Aquinas, Hume, Kant and Hegel. It is unfortunate that IntelLex did not choose to include writings from additional standard editions of Leibniz’s works by Gerhardt and others, such as Couturat’s *Opuscules et fragment inédits de Leibniz* (Paris, 1903) and Grua’s *Textes inédits d’après des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale d’Hanovre* (Paris 1948). The exclusion of material from Volume VI of Gerhardt’s *G. W. Leibniz: Mathematische Schriften* (Berlin, 1848-63) such as the *Brevis demonstracione* and *Specimen dynamicum* seems particularly lamentable in this regard. And others will surely have their own favorite writings that deserve to have been included. IntelLex seems to be aware of such deficiencies and there

are plans to expand the database in the future in order to address these worries. However, it is unclear how long these amendments will take.

Although Gerhardt's *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* is still the standard reference work for Leibniz's philosophy, and offers generally reliable versions of the texts that it contains, serious students of Leibniz philosophy must exercise caution when relying on this database. Already, large portions of Gerhardt have been superseded by volumes that have appeared in the Deutsche Akademie's *G. W. Leibniz: Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag (1923-). The Akademie volumes now provide critical editions of all the philosophical writings that can be dated up to 1690 and all the philosophical correspondence to 1683. And there are a number of respects in which Gerhardt's work is significantly inferior.

As I have already mentioned, *Die philosophischen Schriften* is far from complete. One reason for this is the fact that Gerhardt self-consciously omitted a large number of the texts from the manuscript collection in Hannover with which he was working. The recent publication of Band IV of Reihe VI of the *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* allows us to get a sense of the extent of this. A concordance from the index volume to Band IV of Reihe VI (p. 458) lists forty-eight pieces that appear in both Band IV and Gerhardt's *Die philosophischen Schriften*. Band IV contains five hundred and twenty two pieces. And, while it is true that some of the pieces that are found in Reihe VI go beyond the scope of Gerhardt's philosophical volumes, these are in the minority.

An additional problem with Gerhardt's edition stems from the fact that some of Leibniz's writings are not to be found in the collection at Hannover and were unavailable to Gerhardt. This reveals itself particularly vividly, though not exclusively, in connection with the philosophical correspondences. For the most part, Gerhardt's transcriptions are based on the actual letters received by Leibniz and the penultimate drafts (sometimes accompanied by earlier drafts) of the letters that Leibniz sent. In some cases, perhaps most famously the Arnauld correspondence, the final versions of Leibniz's letters also exist and differ from the versions that Gerhardt used.

We can hope that some of these difficulties will be alleviated by the promised extension of the Leibniz database in the future. However, it is clear that Leibniz scholars would be best served by an electronic edition of all of the available *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. This said, however, it should not be forgotten that for many years to come we will need to rely on older editions, such as Gerhardt, for access to works that appeared later in Leibniz's life. Thus, even in a world

which did contain an electronic version of the currently available volumes of the *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, we should still have need of significant portions of Gerhardt's *Die philosophische Schriften*.

The *Œuvres Complètes de René Descartes* provides far greater coverage than the *Leibniz: Philosophische Schriften* database. It contains the edition of Descartes' works which was recently produced by the Connaught Descartes Project at the University of Toronto (headed by André Gombay). IntelLex advertise this database as containing "a complete new edition of the entire philosophical and scientific corpus of Descartes" which contains "all of the finished works, including those published posthumously, all of the correspondence (including letters to him), all of the surviving drafts and fragments". While this is an accurate reflection of the contents, the labeling here is slightly misleading. The Toronto team did not create an edition from scratch. Rather, the *Œuvres Complètes* is a modified and slightly enlarged version of the standard edition of Descartes' works by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery.

The main differences are as follows: (1) the inclusion of the recently discovered abstract of Descartes' Poitiers Law degree dissertation; (2) a chronological reordering of the correspondence; and (3) the removal of Adam and Tannery's notes and editorial machinery. The pagination of the *Œuvres Complètes* follows the Adam and Tannery pagination throughout.

This edition of Descartes' works is the most complete that is currently available and IntelLex are to be applauded for providing this to us in electronic format. My one complaint is that the database contains no information about the ways in which Adam and Tannery was modified, about the additional sources that were used or the rationale for the changes. But it is also worth noting that the editors of the *Œuvres Complètes* follow Adam and Tannery in omitting Clerselier's French translation of the Seventh Objections and the Latin version of the *Passiones animae*, a fact that will clearly disappoint some scholars.

The Continental Rationalists contains the following works: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vols. 1 and 2*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, 1984). *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge, 1981). *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, (Hackett, 1989), *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Vol. 1*, trans. and ed. by Edwin Curley, (Princeton, 1985).

The Continental Rationalists is one of IntelLex's early efforts. It differs from the previous two databases, in that it consists exclusively of English language

material. Although the texts on this database are all standard translations, the selection seems somewhat meager in comparison with databases that have been produced more recently. For one thing there are no works by other “rationalists” such as Malebranche and Arnauld. And even with the people that are represented we might wish for more. In particular, while we have a good selection of Descartes’ writings in the first two volumes of Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch, without the third we have no selections from Descartes’ correspondence. Spinoza is represented by the first volume of Curley’s *Collected Works*, but this leaves us without the *Theological Political Treatise*. The Leibniz selections are perhaps the most deficient. There is no *Theodicy* and a number of other important works are completely absent or appear in abbreviated form. And an additional problem arises in connection with the Leibniz selections. Remnant and Bennett’s *New Essays* now exists in a revised second edition, dating from 1996, and Ariew and Garber’s *Philosophical Essays* has been reprinted with changes since *The Continental Rationalists* database was created. IntelLex has suggested that it would like to produce a newer version of this database which expands the selection of authors and translations, and although the contents of the current database are useful, appropriate expansion and revision would make the collection far more desirable.

I want to close with a more general evaluation of the databases and the Views software. From the outline of Views above it should be clear that this software offers most, if not all, of the features that one might need for successful navigation of the databases. Users have the means to locate pieces of text within seconds, to create the equivalent of innumerable copies of the same book with underlined text and marginalia, and to print and save all manner of documents by piecing together portions of works. The appearance of the databases makes them easy to read and work with. Diagrams and non-standard text appear on the screen just as they do in the original documents. Furthermore, the use of shadow files allows one to modify easily features of the database such as the font type, size, and color. In short, Views and the databases that it contains are very easy to master and provide scholars with a number of powerful tools which may be useful for both research and teaching.

Turning to the databases themselves, it seems likely that *Leibniz: Philosophische Schriften* and the *Œuvres Complètes de René Descartes* will fulfill quite different roles from that of *The Continental Rationalists*. The first two will be of little use to any but academic scholars, whereas *The Continental Rationalists* is likely to be of most benefit in connection with teaching - particularly in cases where students have access to the database through a university network.

The usefulness of an electronic database in connection with scholarship is immediately apparent. Databases make it far easier to locate passages in which a philosopher is discussing a given concept or philosopher. One could, for example, locate every occurrence of the name “Malebranche” and its variants, throughout all seven volumes of the *Philosophische Schriften* with the click of a mouse. But not only could these passages be located, they could be copied and incorporated into other files. Thus, it would be relatively easy to use one’s search of Malebranche to create a document consisting of all and only the passages in which Malebranche is discussed. Furthermore, Views’ shadow files allow for detailed notes on the text, of a kind that would be undesirable in most personal copies of Gerhardt and prohibited in library copies.

For these reasons, I warmly welcome the recent addition of original language databases which cover the works of Leibniz and Descartes to InteLex’s collection. Despite the misgivings that I have raised regarding the scope of the Leibniz collection, scholars have a great deal to gain from the purchase of these databases, or by encouraging the libraries at their institutions to obtain them. There can be little doubt that they will be enormously useful. Of course, the advent of such technology may also have negative consequences. There is a worry that scholars who have access to databases such as the *Philosophische Schriften* and *Œuvres Complètes*, might be tempted to produce scholarship that relies too much on word searches and loses sight of the need to step back and survey larger bodies of text. Nevertheless, in the hands of those wishing to base their interpretations on the most complete survey possible of the relevant literature, it strikes me that databases such as these can only serve to improve our understanding of the history of philosophy. Searchable databases which encompass large amounts, or all of the writings of individual philosophers will make it much harder for us to rest content with our favorite bits of text, and encourage the development of interpretative hypotheses that come closer to capturing all of the relevant data. Unfortunately, in the case of Leibniz it will still be a long time before it will be possible to have all the relevant data in electronic form.

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