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Essay Reviews

Radicality and culturalism: first approximation to the true dialectics of the Enlightenment

Jonathan Irvine Israel: *The Enlightenment that failed. Ideas, revolution, and democratic defeat, 1748–1830*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. ix+1070 pp. ISBN 9780198738404, hbk.

Antoine Lilti: *L'héritage des lumières*. Paris: EHESS, Gallimard & Seuil, 2019. 405 pp. ISBN 9782021427899, pbk.

Jonathan Israel is at present—at the acme of a long career of writing voluminous and learned books on the Enlightenment—a celebrated authority on that period, in spite of also being a highly controversial scholar, less because of any specific factual claims than because of the scheme of interpretation which he applies to the period, separating its exponents into neat categories such as Moderate Enlightenment, Radical Enlightenment, and Counter-Enlightenment. Although two of his earlier books have already been translated into English, Antoine Lilti is no doubt much less known to a non-francophone scholarly audience, but he must nevertheless be considered one of the foremost contemporary experts on the Enlightenment, and although his writings are less prolific than those of Israel, there can be no doubt about his erudition. In Israel's new book there are at least 24 pages, distributed all over the volume, where he turns critically on Lilti as the foremost representative of what he calls "the negative critique," often accompanying his reference to Lilti with the term "postmodernist," which is clearly an invective to his mind. Lilti's take on Israel is more clearly circumscribed (223–268), because it almost exclusively appears in a chapter adapted from an earlier critical review of Israel's work.

For anybody reading these two books, there can be no doubt that the animosity apparent between these two authors has a deeper source. For Jonathan Israel, the history of Enlightenment ideas constitutes a formative leverage in the creation of modern society. While he claims that, after 1830, socialism came to occupy the position of a radical critique until then held by Radical Enlightenment, one cannot help thinking that his sympathy is not with that development (898 ff.). Antoine Lilti perceives the Enlightenment as representing a much more heterogenous assortment of ideas than Israel does, and

also has more mixed feelings about the benefits it has brought. Nonetheless he must think that, for better or worse, the Enlightenment heritage (as his title reads) is still with us today. It would be simplistic to claim that the difference between Israel and Lilti is purely ideological, but it can certainly not be reduced to a disagreement about facts. But before engaging with the nature of their antagonism, we have to consider the content of the books separately.

Jonathan Israel's new book is a sequel, albeit a physically and intellectually weightier one, to the grand fresco of the Enlightenment and the revolutions which he has been in the business of painting in a series of books for the last two decades. There are two ways, equally valid, to conceive this book in relation to the earlier ones. In the first instance, it is a supplement: in historical time, it starts earlier than the other books—indeed, even before the years indicated in the subtitle, taking into account the relation of (Radical) Enlightenment to trends in the Renaissance and the Reformation—and it ends later, pursuing the survival of Enlightenment ideas until 1830 and beyond. The geographical scope of this volume is also wider than earlier volumes, including, in Early Enlightenment, not only English Deism, but political developments in Denmark and Sweden; considering what happened in Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Britain, the US, Spain, and the West Indies, more or less contemporary with the French Revolution; and accounting for post-revolutionary times in Europe, which also happened to be the time of the revolutions in Latin America.

The other way of looking at Israel's new book is as a response to his critics. In fact, the introduction (1–27) as well as the conclusion (923–942) are dedicated to this purpose, and there are numerous other occasions in the running text where Israel addresses some of his critics. The critique to Israel's version of the Enlightenment has two essential points: the question of whether the (Radical) Enlightenment as a whole burst forth fully armed out of the head of Spinoza; and the question of whether Israel's distinction between a Moderate and a Radical Enlightenment is true to historical facts.

Israel starts out denying that he has ever claimed that Spinoza was the originator of the entire (Radical) Enlightenment (3). As somebody who has read all of Israel's earlier books, I must confess that even if this was not what Israel wanted to say I doubt that any reader comes out of their reading experience without having the conviction that Spinoza was wholly responsible for the ideas present during the Enlightenment. Now Israel certainly goes a long way to qualify this impression: he presents "the *cercle spinoziste*" as a debating ground for radical thinkers in the Netherlands (14 f., 116 f.), he admits that Franciscus van den Enden may have been the one influencing Spinoza, rather than the other way round (56 ff.), and that, in any case, the real initiators of the Radical Enlightenment were the De la Court brothers

(59 ff.). Why not then talk about the van Enden circle, or the De la Court circle? Although Israel does not say so, it is clear that, already at the time, radical ideas were generally blamed on Spinoza. It is significant that the famous book on "the three impostors," i.e. Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad, was often published with Spinoza's name in the title ("L'esprit de Spinoza").

With regard to the question of Moderate and Radical Enlightenment, Israel manages the distinction in a much more subtle way in the present book than in his previous work. To begin with, he now offers a definition of Radical Enlightenment, which, as far as I can tell, in his earlier books has only been a category implied by the thinkers included in it. In his new book, he repeatedly observes that Radical Enlightenment consists of the combination of one-substance metaphysics and the plea for (representative) democracy. Moderate Enlightenment is not explicitly defined, but can at least now be understood as the rejection of either (representative) democracy in favour of its direct form, or the dismissal of all kinds of democracy, and/or the absence of one-substance metaphysics. On Israel's reading, the Radical Enlighteners pursued representative democracy, which means, on one hand, that it should not be direct, but, on the other hand, that all members of the population should be able to vote. In one way or other, Israel's moderate Enlighteners were not in favour of this option.

It is neither theoretically nor historically obvious that one-substance metaphysics and democracy have to go together. In the present book, Israel observes that the necessary relation he has often claimed between one-substance metaphysics and adopting a democratizing programme should not be understood as a mutual relation, but merely as democracy becoming possible only after adopting one-substance metaphysics (i.e., in his interpretation, materialism) (924 f.). Even if this implication—which is not at all obvious—is accepted, it is difficult to understand how Spinozian one-substance metaphysics, given its determinism, could allow for any kind of political choice between democracy or any other regime, let alone ethics, in spite of what Spinoza manifestly thought. But, clearly, d'Holbach, Hélvetius, and even, at least at times, Diderot, were not troubled by this paradox.

Israel admits that some of his heroes do not quite fit into the frame of reference opposing Radical to Moderate Enlighteners. Not even Israel can avoid describing Rousseau as a "radical," because he was clearly perceived, at the time, both by the establishment and the *philosophes*, as being "the odd man out," breaking at times with what was taken for granted by one or the other quarter. This is not to deny that Rousseau's work could be used, thanks to its ambiguities, by Robespierre, in order to propagate Counter-Enlightenment politics, as Israel claims (190, 457 ff.), and it is difficult to understand how anybody, including Lilti can entertain a different view on Robespierre, given the historical record, no matter to what extent Robespierre was justified in

referring to Rousseau (227, 457 ff.). Israel even seems to entertain the idea of a possible "Christian Radical Enlightenment" (197 ff.). In the case of Condorcet, who in most respects seems to be the embodiment of Radical Enlightenment, Israel admits that he does not conform to the pattern of ideas that Israel expects him to follow from believing in one-substance metaphysics and defending representative democracy.

As Vincenzo Ferrone observes in his recent book, *The Enlightenment and the rights of man* (2019), "talking of generic and sometimes anachronistic categories such as radical or moderate Enlightenment does not really take us very far" (94 f.). Nevertheless, the distinction between Radical and Moderate Enlightenment could make sense, if they were conceived of as being ideal types, in the sense of Max Weber: that is if, like Eleanor Rosch's prototypes, they serve to bring together everything which is characteristic of the category, allowing for all kinds of marginal cases, while, in addition, admitting contradictions which may result from historical development (see Göran Sonesson: *Pictorial concepts*, 1989, 65 ff.).

The title of Israel's book, and of the fourth concluding part of it, is "The Enlightenment that failed" (771 ff.). A more adequate title would perhaps have been "The Restoration that failed." Because Israel goes on to show that, in spite of the retreat of Enlightenment ideas during Napoleon's reign and during that of Louis XVIII, essential parts of Enlightenment reforms were *not* curtailed. So why does Israel think that the Radical Enlightenment failed? Although this is never made explicit, the final chapter before the conclusion presents a clue (898 ff.): Israel claims that Karl Marx, along with many other Young Hegelians, who were from the start fundamentally inspired by Enlightenment ideas, discovered Socialism in the early 1840s, and on this basis elaborated a new framework for the critical stance on society, in terms of class war, which has since remained the only respectable position from which society could be reproved.

In the conclusion to his book, Israel quotes one of his critics as stating that the aims that Radical Enlightenment failed to realize through revolutions were eventually brought about peacefully by the Moderate Enlightenment (932 f.). Israel rightly objects that his Radical Enlighteners did not plan for any revolution, in spite of inspiring one. Nevertheless, he fails to observe that, according to his definition of the Radical Enlightenment—as involving representative democracy (forgetting about one-substance metaphysics)—it is the former, and not the Moderate Enlightenment, which had no such ambition, which has prevailed in much of contemporary society, at least in Europe.

Throughout his book, Israel never loses an occasion to denounce the "postmodernist" Antoine Lilti. As someone who has read and appreciated Lilti's earlier work about French saloon culture (*Le monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*, 2005), I was surprised by Israel's use of this

invective (which it clearly is to him). Lilti's earlier book no doubt was provocative in disrupting the consensus (as manifested, for instance, in the work of Dena Goodman), according to which women held a leading role in saloon life and aristocrats and *hommes de lettres* met each other continually in the saloons. But Lilti disrupted only by offering uncontroversial facts, showing, notably, that the women holding saloons played a very passive part, and that nobles and intellectuals were generally invited on different weekdays. This, however, is not what bothers Israel, who has never shown any interest in issues pertaining to the everyday life of people at the time, not even those of intellectuals and nobles.

Although Lilti in his new book is more interested than in earlier works to take an ideological stand, to label this stand "postmodernism" seems to me a misnomer. Postmodernism is, admittedly, a very fuzzy notion, but, if we take our cues from the work of Derrida, Lyotard, and the late Foucault (including their followers in the study of literature and art), it amounts to a kind of relativism. Lilti's qualms cannot be understood as a straightforward relativism. Rather, his point of view might be "culturalism," as defined by Frederik Stjernfelt ("What is Culturalism?" in *Lexia: Rivista Semiotica*, 5–6, 2011, 369–400): it consists in "claiming cultural rights against the Enlightenment tradition for universal, individual rights."

Lilti rightly insists on the heterogeneity of the Enlightenment, not easily amenable to a simple opposition between a moderate and a radical branch, as becomes apparent when trying to make sense of Israel's work. However, if not all representatives of the Enlightenment opposed slavery and colonialism and argued for the equality of all human beings, of whatever sex, class, and race, they still inaugurated the critical spirit which permitted such critique, including postcolonialism. Indeed, Lilti proceeds to demonstrate that Postcolonialist critique in its simplest form is unjustified, Enlighteners having on the whole been remarkable for denouncing slavery, colonialism and European abuse of other countries, as well as having shown an authentic curiosity about other cultures (47 ff.). Nevertheless, Lilti then goes on to present a more damaging version of the Postcolonialist critique, according to which the very universalism of the values postulated by Enlightenment thinkers amounts to a neglect of the "position of enunciation" of these values, situated in the small part of the world called Europe (45). He does not really address this theme further, because he soon discovers that less superficial thinkers within Postcolonialism, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Leela Gandhi readily admit that Enlightenment values are indispensable for their form of critique (60). Why they also think that these values are, at the same time, inadequate is less clear from Lilti's text.

Lilti then proceeds to demonstrate the ambiguities and contradictions of *Histoire des deux Indes* (1770–1780), epitomized by the repeated denouncements

of slavery and colonialism on the one hand, and the disdain expressed for people on the American continent on the other. One would have liked to resolve the issue by attributing the former to Diderot, and the latter to Raynal, but Lilti shows that the latter kind of remarks are also present in the parts which we know were written by Diderot (60 ff.). But is this not expecting too much from "the maturity of the human species," considered as an operation recently set in motion? Raynal, Diderot, and their collaborators were human beings living in a particular culture at a particular time. They could still be the initiators of a new process of human understanding which is still ongoing, though it may never be complete.

This brings us back to the question of whether universal values can emerge from, in Chakbrabarty's terms, a provincial situation. It seems to me that if universal values cannot be discovered and/or constructed from within a provincial situation, they can never arise. Like it or not, we are always in a provincial situation. Perhaps this is exactly what Lilti wants to say, but this poses the question of which "position of enunciation" is occupied by Lilti and other culturalists.

Lilti returns to the question on a superficial level, when reproaching Voltaire for using the pronoun "we" to talk about the Europeans (and sometimes only parts of them), in spite of his ambitions to write a global history, in direct opposition to Bossuet (92 ff.). He addresses more or less the same reproach to Volney, using the latter's post-Revolution writings to demonstrate the contradictions (115 ff.). But Volney had the bad fortune, from the point of view of his later reputation, of trying to make a living several decades after the failed Revolution. Voltaire and Volney are necessarily ethnocentric, or, in terms of the semiotics of culture (see Dunér & Sonesson (eds.): *Human Lifeworlds: The Cognitive Semiotics of Cultural Evolution*, 2016), *Ego-centric*, but so are the representatives of all other cultures. Before the Enlightenment, to all appearance, nobody, and in particular nobody outside Europe, with few exceptions, was ever able to go beyond such Ego-centricity, which posits the other as an *Alius*; they could therefore not start treating the other as an *Alter*. This is what I view as the exceptionality of European history: thanks to human rights, tolerance, and critical spirit, Europe is the first culture to be able to see other cultures as, at least in some ways, better than their own. In fact, the Enlightenment invented the critique of imperialism, colonialism and orientalism, as demonstrated by Jürgen Osterhammel (*Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, 1998) and Sankar Muthu (*Enlightenment against empire*, 2003). As Osterhammel notes, the complacent arrogance of Europe is a creation of the nineteenth century.

Lilti's book is a collection of papers published in different journals, slightly recast to conform to the division of the book into the three topics of universality, modernity, and politics. All these papers address cases highly

interesting in themselves. Within the limits of the present review it will only be possible to consider two issues, because of their relevance to the other book reviewed. Although Lilti does not connect them, these issues are somewhat interrelated.

In one of the chapters, Lilti tells the story of the impact of Habermas' notion of "public sphere" on the scholars involved with the history of the Enlightenment, which first served as an inspiration but was later abandoned (167 ff.). Habermas, it will be remembered, first wrote a kind of historico-critical book about the emergence of the public sphere during the Enlightenment, much thanks to the abundance of journals, pamphlets and other printing matters, and also the ensuing discussions in the coffee houses. Habermas then generalised this to the idea of a space in which free exchange of rational argument became (potentially) possible as a result of the Enlightenment heritage, which, nevertheless, has continued to be endangered until this day. Lilti does not tell us whether Habermas' paradigm simply went out of fashion, or whether it was shown to be inadequate, but the rest of his chapter adduces excellent reasons for thinking the latter is the case (182 ff.). Enlightenment public space was not very much about the free exchange of rational arguments, no matter how much that was desired by many of the Enlightenment thinkers, but about the extension of the cosmopolitan—but still very much limited—"republic of letters" to include a much broader audience, on the favour of which the authors were dependent for their outcome.

Another chapter in the book contains a version of Lilti's critique of Israel, which is repeatedly referred to in Israel's book (223 ff.). The essential points of Lilti's critique are the obvious ones, which I referred to above: that it is not plausible that the whole of (Radical) Enlightenment was inspired by Spinoza's work, and that the distinction between Moderate and Radical Enlightenment is too crude to account for the complexity of Enlightenment ideas, in time and space, and also within the lifetime of different representatives of the Enlightenment. In his new book Israel, without explicitly acknowledging his errors, goes a long way to temper his earlier claims. Another classical point of critique of Israel's work consists in saying, as Lilti does, that ideas alone cannot have produced such an event as the French Revolution. My impression is that Israel has answered this charge in earlier publications, but in his new book he does so very explicitly: there have been many revolts throughout history, and some of those occurred at the time of the French Revolution, but the reason that the latter turned out to be more than just another revolt is that a group of intellectuals grasped the occasion to try to realize their utopian idea of a just society (927 ff.).

Lilti makes one original point, which has not been answered by Israel is his new book, and it is clearly connected to his critique of the Habermas

paradigm. No matter how much Israel, in earlier books, talks about "a history of controversies" he does not bring this point of view to his description of the Enlightenment, except in the rather rigid form of the opposition between Moderate and Radical Enlightenment. Thus, he misses, as Lilti makes clear in his critique of Habermas, what is original to the Enlightenment: the setting of issues onto debate, not necessarily in any rational format. In fact, as Lilti intimates, the rules were basically set by the new extension of the public to the increasing number of those who could read. This goes a long way to confirm my suggestion that the part of the reproaches addressed to the Enlightenment by Horkheimer and Adorno that is correct is its being at the origin of the cultural industry (Sonesson: "Three visits to the earthly city of the Enlightenment philosophers" in *Lychnos* 2019, 247–255).

As Lilti observes at the very beginning of his book, the critique of the Enlightenment has gone through three phases: that of the Counter-Enlightenment, become, after the Revolution, the Conservative Establishment; that of the Frankfurt School; and that of the so-called Post-Colonialist Critique (37 f.). While it is easy to understand the conservative opposition to Enlightenment values, it is more complicated to make sense of the other two phases. If Adorno and Horkheimer had been orthodox Marxists, what Israel tells us about socialism taking over the radical stance from the Enlightenment could have helped explaining the position of the Frankfurt School: as it is, however, this will hardly do (see further Sonesson in *Lychnos* 2019). Nowadays only historians of ideas (and intellectuals with an interest in history) are interested in the Enlightenment critique formulated by the Frankfurt School. What Lilti terms the Post-Colonialist Critique is much more relevant today, and it clearly accounts for a large part of the different stands on the Enlightenment found in the books by Lilti and Israel.

Although none of them would readily admit it, I think that Israel's and Lilti's arguments stem from the same ground. Just like other manifestations of Radical Critique (Marxism, Anarchism, etc.), Post-Colonialist Critique and any other versions of Culturalism, are impossible to imagine except as part of the Enlightenment heritage. The fundamental contribution of the Enlightenment was the idea of human rights (see Ferrone: *The Enlightenment and the rights of man*, 2019). The best of the Enlightenment thinkers, in their best moments, wanted all human beings to enjoy the same rights. Although they were very much aware of the plights of different human groups, they thought the best that could be offered to them was the exercise of the same rights. What the Enlighteners neglected, in Lilti's terms, was the "position of enunciation," i.e. the specific perspective on human rights of excluded groups wanting to gain, not universal rights, but the right to be different. In this sense, political correctness/culturalism is an exacerbation of Enlight-

enment values, attributing specific rights, including tolerance, to ethnic groups which themselves have never entertained any such values or which may continue to show intolerance vis-à-vis all other groups. It retains the universalism of Enlightenment values within each culture, while relativising the value relation between different cultures. This, not what Horkheimer and Adorno claimed, is the real dialectics of the Enlightenment.

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Rationality and rights: second approximation to the true dialectics of the Enlightenment

Vincenzo Ferrone: *The Enlightenment and the rights of man*. Translated by Elisabetta Tarantino. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019. xii+564 pp. ISBN 9781789620368, pbk.

Margaret C. Jacob: *The secular enlightenment*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. xi+339 pp. ISBN 9780691161327, hbk.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the Enlightenment is more than a label for a particular period in history; it also designates an array of ideas that continue to be relevant. Margaret Jacob ends her book expressing her hope that we will be able "to bring the best of the secular Enlightenment with us into the future" (264). From the very start, Vincenzo Ferrone presents his history of "the rights of man" within the framework of twentieth century politics, notably that of the United Nations, in order to show that, in this precise sense, these rights were discovered by Enlightenment thinkers (19 ff.). None of them, however, dote on the classical picture of the Enlightenment as being "The age of reason," except, of course, in the rather dated sense in which rationality is another name for secularity. The big rational systems of thinking were really products of the seventeenth century, as seems rather well established by now, and these were constantly rejected by the Enlighteners, who held a much more practical and situated notion of reason, not deprived of emotionality, than is their reputation (see references in Sonesson: "Three visits to the earthly city of the Enlightenment philosophers" in *Lychnos* 2019, 247–255). The Enlightenment heritage that Jacob hopes to preserve is the possibility of leading a worldly life, which she believes nowadays has become pervasive even in the United States. Ferrone is less optimistic about the future of "the rights of man" as he understands them: At the very last page of his book he muses over the mystery of "the 'halt' in the Enlightenment programme" (497).

Jacob's new book mostly reads as an introductory account directed at somebody who has hardly heard of the Enlightenment before, citing all the well-known peoples and anecdotes. It is true that she has more to say about the Italian Enlightenment (204 ff.) than is customary (except, of course, in the writings of Venturi and Ferrone) and that she spends an appreciable amount of time taking note of the reactions to the French Revolution, in Britain and the United States, and more briefly in other parts of the world, particularly in the case of those who at first welcomed it enthusiastically as being the fulfilment of the Enlightenment and then, with the occurrence of the Terror, rejected it as the Enlightenment gone awry (233 ff.). In several passages of the book, however, she puts a special emphasis, as promised in the title, on secularity being a cause or a result, or perhaps both, of the Enlightenment, where secularity should be understood not as atheism or lack of faith, but as a renewed interest in this world, of living your life as if the Bible and afterlife did not matter (much). To this purpose, she follows the life stories of a few individuals whose names have not been familiar to posterity, but who have left some traces of their life and opinions in diaries or some other documents (66 ff.). Of particular interest, I believe, is her study of the changes occurring in what was at the time a prototypical mass-market publications, the annual almanacs, showing that as we get further into the eighteenth century, mentions of Biblical time and astrology tend to disappear, being replaced by more worldly business (11 ff., 35–42, 57).

The recent book by Ferrone could also be said to be about secularity, although the word is not often mentioned. This immense work (quantitatively no less than qualitatively) is concerned to recount the convoluted narrative about the secularization of natural rights into political rights. The main thesis of Ferrone's book is that "the rights of man" (not "human rights," for reasons we will come to below) were discovered during the Enlightenment, at least in the sense of being political rights. It is indeed a tortuous story that Ferrone relates, because it comprises several moments of rupture, and they are not recorded in historical order, which makes it especially difficult to keep up the count. Ferrone shows how the notion of the rights of man emerges from a series of displacements of earlier notions, such as the Greek "nomos," as well as mediaeval natural law as conceived by Aquinas and reconceived by Grotius and Pufendorf (29 ff.). As far as I am able to follow the story, however, it is made up of a series of peripeties, and it goes more or less like this: the Greek and Roman philosophers who talked about rights did so laying much more emphasis on the duties of individuals to the state than on their rights (29 ff.). This is equally true of the School of Salamanca, in spite of its defence of the humanity of the peoples of the New World (50 ff.), and also of the notion of natural rights as defended by, notably, Grotius and Pufendorf (53 ff.). The latter did extend the attribution of

rights to all Christians, no matter whether Catholic or Protestant, but no further, that is, not to those holding any other religious belief. Moreover, like all earlier thinkers, Pufendorf postulated that by some kind of implicit contract the individuals had given away their rights to the person in power, that is, the monarch, which it to say that they could have enjoyed those rights only in some kind of mythical past (73 ff.). Barbeyrac and Burlamanque, who in other versions of the story are often presented as precursors to the Enlightenment thinkers, here appear as essentially conveying the message of Grotius and Pufendorf, while introducing slight modifications (83 ff., 132 ff.).

In Ferrone's story, the first hero is Locke, who conceived of each individual as being autonomous and conscious of himself (111 ff.). More generally, however, the Enlightenment introduced the idea of the natural right of each person to the pursuit of happiness (123 ff.). Ferrone goes on to consider the contributions of Diderot and Hume (139 ff.) as well as Rousseau (159 ff.), which, in the end, he finds wanting. Interestingly, he declares Vico—usually famous for his contribution to quite different domains of ideas—to be a precursor to the idea of the rights of man, later on made more concrete in legal terms by Genovesi, Verri, Beccaria, and Filangeri (273 ff., 228 ff., 230 ff., 307 ff.). All along, Ferrone completely avoids relating this process to the declaration of the rights of man occurring at an early stage of the French Revolution.

Ferrone is very clear about one thing: d'Holbach is not a defender of the rights of man, because he wants to reserve power to some kind of social elite (196 ff.), and he thinks, like Pufendorf, that once individuals have implicitly entered the social contract, they have given up all their rights in favour of the state (335 ff.). This presentation of d'Holbach's conception seems very much contrary to even a layman's impression. In Jonathan Israel's recent book, *The Enlightenment that failed* (2019), d'Holbach receives a very different treatment, as one of the foremost representatives of Radical Enlightenment, and thus, among other things, of democracy (178 ff.). Israel's abundant quotations from d'Holbach's works would seem to prove that his interpretation is, historically, the more correct one. But there is more to it. Ferrone and Israel have very different ideas of what forms the basis of the idea of human rights/the rights of man. Ferrone considers the rights as a thing acquired by any person from his/her birth, a fact outside of history, despite his book being all about the recognition of these rights *in* history. According to Israel, d'Holbach, when commenting on Rousseau's conception, admits that human rights may, in a sense, accrue to any individual once born, but still maintains that they can only be realized in the state of society, that is, according to the idea of cultural evolution current at the time, at a time in history when people are living in a more or less organized way together (187 ff.). If so, this goes against the tradition pursued by Ferrone, but, unfortunately, Israel is not always as clear about this interpretation.

Another reason for the different evaluations of key Enlightenment figures by Ferrone and Israel no doubt has to do with their idea of democracy. Israel associates (Radical) Enlightenment with the notion of *representative* democracy. In his new book, Israel defines Radical Enlightenment as the combination of one-substance metaphysics and the plea for (representative) democracy; but in his earlier books, it is safer to say that it is a label for the way of doing Enlightenment characteristic of d'Holbach, Helvétius, Diderot, Condorcet, and a few others, not including Locke and Voltaire, nor Rousseau. It follows that representative democracy is an important feature of Radical Enlightenment, as conceived by Israel. Both those defending enlightened despotism, such as Voltaire, and those in favour of direct voting (in the sense of a referendum), such as (sometimes) Rousseau, are thus excluded. Ferrone is not, as far I can tell, against representative democracy, which is after all our common-sense idea of democracy at present. However, he clearly takes the critics of direct democracy at the time to have been in favour of the rule by an elite. He is right in that respect, but he is wrong if he thinks this elite was supposed to consist of any pre-existing social group (e.g. aristocrats, or people earning a certain amount of money, as was later stipulated during the Revolution). In fact, leading Enlightenment thinkers considered most people to be too ignorant, and thus too easily swayed by populist rhetoric (as later instantiated by Robespierre's Counter-revolution), to be able to take their stand directly on politically important issues. But they also believed that this situation would change, once people were receiving an adequate education, and they also took steps to organize such a system of education (a process excellently recounted by Israel, 563–594) in the all too short time between the overturn of Robespierre's dictatorship, and that of Napoleon. Even Israel cannot avoid commenting that d'Holbach was very optimistic in thinking that the ignorant masses, unable to decide any matter directly, would yet be capable of choosing the right persons to represent them in Parliament (178 ff.).

Jacob's book is interesting for telling us something about the general change of values of society during the period of the Enlightenment, while Ferrone's book traces in detail the history of "human rights" until their coming into their own during the same period. In Ferrone's terms, as well as those of Israel, the French Revolution, not to mention the American one, was certainly a case of failed Enlightenment. But what these books suggest, taken together, is that the Enlightenment really did constitute a process in which ideas were exchanged (not necessarily on very rational terms) with the purpose of creating a better way of living together for human beings. Even if some of the aims of the Enlightenment, such as representative democracy, have been realized, the process itself was halted, as Ferrone specifically observes. All along, however, it has remained an undercurrent of social critique and utopian ideas in the contemporary world.

In this respect, Ferrone may have diagnosed a more serious liability of Enlightenment values in our time than the turn to socialism, referred to by Israel in his new book. In the preface to the English translation, Ferrone insists on retaining in translation the term "rights of man," which is a literal translation of the term used at the time, opposing it to the contemporary term "human rights," which, unlike the attempt by the Enlightenment thinkers to transform rights into political instruments, has become "the battle-cry [. . .] [of] apolitical universalism" (xii). His intention is easier to grasp at the end of the introduction, where he refers to the claim being made by many contemporary thinkers of there being distinct "Asian values" which should be taken into account, in competition with the customary rights of man, which, in their view, merely are "Western values." As Ferrone says, such a view is "a betrayal of Enlightenment values," since it denies the universalist claim of "the rights of man." Ferrone goes on to explain that, "In this sense [. . .] 'man' denoted an individual without gender specification (the use of the masculine pronoun notwithstanding), who was universally the holder of rights. And this applied to all his *variétés*, this being the actual term used by Buffon, all over the world. This is why it is necessary to keep these two terms – the rights of man and human rights – quite distinct from each other" (xii). While Ferrone does not use the nowadays common term "political correctness," it is clear from context that this is what he is thinking of. *Britannica* (https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-correctness; consulted on September 9, 2020) defines "political correctness" as "language that seems intended to give the least amount of offense, especially when describing groups identified by external markers such as race, gender, culture, or sexual orientation." What is really at stake here is of course the ideological standpoint behind such language, from the point of view of which there are such things as Asian values, Muslim values, Black values, Female values, and so on. To the extent that "political correctness" is still felt to be a pejorative term (many classifications started out that way, such as, for instance, "impressionism"), we should perhaps instead talk of "culturalism," which, according to Frederik Stjernfelt ("What is Culturalism?" in *Lexia: Rivista Semiotica*, 5–6, 2011, 369–400), consists in "claiming cultural rights against the Enlightenment tradition for universal, individual rights," whether this is done from supposedly left-wing and right-wing positions.

Although such a position can certainly be described as a betrayal of Enlightenment values, I believe it is also a result of them. In his book, Ferrone shows how the notion of the rights of man emerges from a series of wide-ranging displacements of earlier notions (29 ff.). Just as these notions, which are in many ways in opposition to the Enlightenment notion of "rights of man," serve as the basis for the latter, the "politically correct" notion of human rights clearly would be impossible without its basis in the Enlightenment

notion. In fact, Enlightenment thinkers, as in particular Jürgen Osterhammel (*Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, 1998) and Sankar Muthu (*Enlightenment against empire*, 2003) have shown, already mounted a defence of many minorities and ethnic groups. But their ambition was for all these groups to be able to enjoy the same rights, not for each group to have specific rights as members of their group. Between the final, belated triumph of the notion of human rights at the beginning of the last century, and the emergence of the culturist notion of rights, there is clearly not a sufficient historical depth to document the changes, in the way Ferrone has realised this for earlier centuries. But contemporary ethnography will no doubt confirm that there are no manifestations of "political correctness" in any of the countries where Enlightenment values have not prevailed beforehand. This is certainly a clue that it is not in the notion of reason, as claimed by the Frankfurt School, but in that of rights, that the intrinsic contradictions are found which give rise to the dialectics of the Enlightenment.

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De mänskliga rättigheternas möjligheter och begränsningar som politiskt ideal

Justine Lacroix & Jean-Yves Pranchère: *Le procès des droits de l'homme. Généalogie du scepticisme démocratique.* Paris: Seuil, 2016. 352 s. ISBN 9782021181005, hft.

Justine Lacroix & Jean-Yves Pranchère: *Les droits de l'homme rendent-ils idiot*. Paris: Seuil, 2019. 98 s. ISBN 9782021384178, hft.

Alltsedan de mänskliga rättigheterna deklarerades 1789 har de utsatts för hård kritik. Edmund Burke, Jeremy Bentham och Karl Marx var oeniga om mycket, men samtliga var de kritiska mot mänskliga rättigheter som en strukturerande princip för politiskt handlande. Lika mångfacetterad är dagens kritik, vilket är särskilt tydligt i den franskspråkiga debatten. Flera av Frankrikes mest inflytelserika intellektuella, såsom filosofen och den före detta chefredaktören för tidskriften *Le Débat* Marcel Gauchet och filosofen Pierre Manent, har kritiserat det starka inflytande som mänskliga rättigheter har över dagens politiska liv. Det är med siktet inställt på dessa kritiker – från det förflutna såväl som i samtiden – som filosofen Jean-Yves Pranchère och den politiska teoretikern Justine Lacroix, båda två från Belgien, formulerat ett försvar för de mänskliga rättigheterna i de nyligen publicerade

Le procès des droits de l'homme (2016) samt *Les droits de l'homme rendent-ils idiot* (2019).

Den första delen i studien från 2016 utgörs av en överblick över den samtida kritiken av de mänskliga rättigheterna, vilken indelas i tre övergripande strömningar. Den första benämner författarna den antimoderna. Inom ramen för denna ryms dels en strömning som går ut på att den moderna individcentrerade rättighetstraditionen underminerar politikens specificitet, dels en teologiskt grundad kritik mot den moderna idén om mänskliga rättigheter. Av dessa är det framförallt på den sistnämnda som författarna fokuserar. De mänskliga rättigheterna uppfattas här som en förlängning av den nominalistiska tanketradition som växte fram ur högmedeltidens universaliestrid. Enligt nominalisterna är våra begrepp mänskliga konstruktioner och inte, vilket begreppsrealister som Thomas av Aquino hävdade, uttryck för av människan oberoende entiteter. Härigenom upprättade nominalisterna en åtskillnad mellan objekt i världen och de separat existerande entiteter som realisterna antog att de korresponderade mot. Objektens namn betraktas i stället som godtyckliga och resultatet av vår vilja, som likt Guds vilja är obunden. Denna förskjutning spelade senare en central roll vid utvecklandet av den moderna kontraktsteorin hos tänkare som Thomas Hobbes, vilken vände sig emot metafysiska ”absurditeter” som att människan skulle ha ett högre *telos* att sträva mot, vilket realisten Thomas av Aquino hade hävdat. Frihet är att följa sin obundna vilja, och människans primära skyldighet är att efterleva den naturlag som kräver att människan ska göra vad som står i hennes makt för att skydda sitt liv. Enligt kritikerna av denna idé, bland vilka vi till exempel återfinner den brittiske teologen John Milbank, är den alltmer nihilistiska samhällsordning som vi i dag lever i – konstituerad av en global varumarknad i kombination med stater som syftar till att skydda invånarnas mänskliga rättigheter och tillgodose individernas behov som konsumenter – en effekt av denna successiva förskjutning från en ändamålsstrukturerad till en viljebaserad samhällsordning.

Den andra övergripande strömningen skiljer sig från den förstnämnda genom att de mänskliga rättigheternas starka ställning här primärt betraktas som ett hot mot demokratin. Tonvikten vilar på en kritik av den abstrakta föreställning om individen som postuleras i åberopandet av de mänskliga rättigheterna i det samtida politiska livet. Genom att reproducera en snedvriden uppfattning om relationen mellan individ och samhälle, bidrar den starka ställning som mänskliga rättigheter i dag har till att underminera de institutionella villkor som ligger till grund för den särställning som individen har i dagens västerländska demokratier.

Den tredje kategorin som identifieras är det som författarna benämner den ”radikala” kritiken. Enligt företrädarna för denna position fungerar mänskliga rättigheter som en ideologisk kraft vilken underblåser den nylibe-

rala samhällsordningen. Genom att betona individens fri- och rättigheter förflyttas fokus från de socialt specifika och strukturella problem som begränsar människor, till att handla om en relation mellan stat och individ. Mänskliga rättigheter genererar på så vis en typ av offermentalitet, där rättigheter blir ett medel för att skydda utsatta individer, snarare än att inspirera dem till politiskt agentskap.

Som författarna påpekar delar dessa i grunden väldigt olika kritiska strömningar samtliga en föreställning om att de mänskliga rättigheterna har bistått statens och marknadens parallella expansion och härigenom underminerat förutsättningarna för kollektivt självbestämmande. I en ömsesidig växelverkan har de båda – mänskliga rättigheter och varusfärens expansion – på så vis fungerat som en central drivkraft bakom den nyliberala samhällsordning som tagit form de senaste decennierna.

I del två av *Le procès des droits de l'homme* följer sedan sju fallstudier av historiska kritiker av de mänskliga rättigheterna, från Burke via Bentham, Auguste Comte, Louis de Bonald, Joseph de Maistre och Marx fram till Carl Schmitt. Att gå in på hur deras olika former av kritik ser ut finns det inte utrymme för här. Men då författarna gör anspråk på att säga någonting nytt om Marx är det motiverat att säga något om denna läsning. Med en metod som författarna lånar från den norske samhällsfilosofen Jon Elster och benämner den överlagda anakronismen, tar de avstamp i spänningarna i Marx verk och försöker överskrida dessa genom att argumentera för hur hans emancipatoriska idéer kan skrivas in i den moderna traditionen om mänskliga rättigheter – trots att Marx själv vid ett flertal tillfällen avfärdade dem som ett symptom på den förvridna föreställning om individen som kapitalismen ger upphov till. Lacroix och Pranchère ställer denna explicita kritik mot hans återkommande åberopande av en mer komplex idé om individuell frihet, och argumenterar för att denna är oskiljaktig från den politiska förståelse av de mänskliga rättigheterna som Marx kritik öppnar upp för. Läsningen av Marx återkommer även och sätts i spel när författarna i de två avslutande kapitlen försöker skriva fram sin egen förståelse av och försvar av mänskliga rättigheter via Arendts idé om rätten till rättigheter.

I denna tredje och syntetiserande del av boken lyckas författarna på ett förtjänstfullt sätt visa hur Arendts idé om rätten till rättigheter är relaterad till hennes betonande av begreppet jämlikhet som en politisk kategori snarare än som en rättviseprincip för fördelning av resurser. Deras angreppssätt kan därmed även förstås som ett försök att överskrida den skarpa åtskillnad som vissa formuleringar hos Arendt bjuder in till mellan det politiska och det sociala. Det politiska, beskrivet som ett slags idealiserat praktiserande av frihet, kontrasterar Arendt ibland mot vad hon benämner det sociala, vilket beskrivs som sådant som egentligen hör den privata sfären till, men som i det moderna samhället gjorts till offentliga angelägenheter. Av flera

uttolkare har detta uppfattats som att Arendt menar att till exempel fördelningsfrågor inte skulle vara av en politisk karaktär, ja, att hela välfärdsstaten till sin natur skulle vara anti-politisk. Lacroix och Pranchère visar emellertid, väl förankrade i hennes rika och ibland motsägelsefulla *oeuvre*, hur distinktionen mellan det politiska och det sociala kan aktiveras för att belysa hur det sätt genom vilket välfärdspolitik och våra fri- och rättigheter artikuleras och praktiseras på har givit upphov till olika problem, snarare än att tala om det politiska och det sociala som två av varandra oberoende monoliter.

En annan styrka med deras argumentation – i enlighet med idén om rätten till rättigheter – är deras betonande av de institutionella villkoren för realiserandet av demokratin som ett politiskt projekt. I öppen polemik mot de teoretiker som definierar politiskt handlande som något per definition gränsöverskridande (såsom exempelvis den samtida filosofen Jacques Rancière), där politik reduceras till de handlingar som ifrågasätter den rådande ordningen i sin helhet, betonar författarna den fundamentala betydelsen av ett institutionellt ramverk inom vilket rätten till rättigheter kan praktiseras.

Betraktade var och en för sig är de tre delarna väl sammanhållna och rymmer flera klargörande distinktioner. Det är därför synd att författarna inte lyckats att bättre integrera dem. De fina läsningar och teoretiska resonemang som de separata delarna rymmer förtjänar bättre. Deras historiska läsningar försvinner i princip helt, sånär som på Marx, genom vilken de, vid sidan av Arendt, på ett effektivt sätt lyckas skriva fram sin egen position.

I kraft av det stora utrymme som de ägnar åt Arendt och Marx väcker boken även vissa frågor kring en annan, minst lika central men mindre uttalad, inspirationskälla för författarna: den franske filosofen Claude Lefort (1924–2010). Att de är djupt beroende av honom framgår tydligt. Men med hänsyn tagen till den framskjutna ställning som hans resonemang kring mänskliga rättigheter intar i boken, undrar man som läsare varför inte han också har tilldelats ett eget kapitel, precis som Arendt och Marx. På så vis hade de kunnat tydliggöra på vilket sätt de vidareutvecklar – vilket de onekligen gör – även hans reflektioner när de, i synnerhet i bokens två avslutande kapitel, går i dialog med andra tänkare. Samtidigt som denna närkamp med ett antal teoretiker – utöver de redan nämnda kan även framhållas Étienne Balibar, Étienne Tassin med flera – är ett bidrag i sig till diskussionen, lämnas mycket lite utrymme åt de många kritiker som de presenterat i bokens två första delar. Det är i ljuset av denna brist som vi ska förstå deras uppföljande bok från hösten 2019, där fokus ligger på att bemöta kritiken av de mänskliga rättigheternas starka ställning i den samtida franskspråkiga debatten.

I *Les droits de l'homme rendent-ils idiot?* riktar författarna in sig på kritiker i den franska samtida debatten som i princip samtliga sorterar under den andra strömningen i boken från 2016. Det blir nu även ännu tydligare att den underrubrik som de i boken från 2016 lånat från titeln på en av Gauchets

publikationer, *La démocratie contre elle-même* (2002) inte är en slump; betydande delar är ägnade åt att försöka besvara hans kritik av de mänskliga rättigheternas ställning i det senmoderna samhället.

Boken är indelad i fyra tematiska kapitel varav samtliga, liksom inledningen och slutsatsen, fokuserar på invändningar som Gauchet formulerat. Utöver de aspekter som redan framhållits – att det sätt som mänskliga rättigheter aktiveras på i dag går hand i hand med en ohämmad marknadsexpansion samt underminerar förutsättningarna för kollektivt mobiliserande projekt genom att de tar avstamp i individens fri- och rättigheter – lyfter de i denna bok även den något mer specifika franska debatten där det sätt som mänskliga rättigheter aktiveras på i dag anses bidra till ett underminerande av det sociala livets koder och allmän hövlighet i samhället.

Kärnan i denna inte för alla kanske helt intuitiva kritik går ut på att de mänskliga rättigheterna är ett led i en juridifieringsprocess av samhälleliga normer och vanor, vilken har som effekt att det som inte är kodifierat betraktas som legitimt. De oskrivna regler och koder som människor tidigare agerat utifrån skulle enligt dessa kritiker ha dukat under för en skock knölar som först och sist har sina rättigheter för ögonen. Lacroix och Pranchère identifierar framförallt två problem med denna kritik.

För det första betonar de att processen av juridiskt kodifierande av mellanmänskliga relationer inte är ny, utan tvärtom är intimt sammanflätad med det moderna samhället, och att flera av kritikernas positioner går tillbaka till en reaktionär kritik av det moderna samhället som sådant. Det är förvisso sant, skriver Lacroix och Pranchère, att rättslig kodifiering bryter upp vissa kollektiva band, men så som denna kritik formulerats skiljer den sig inte nämnvärt från hur kontrarevolutionära tänkare som Louis de Bonald resonerade, som år 1816 fick igenom det som kom att kallas *La loi Bonald*, vilken på nytt olagligförklarade skilsmässan efter 1792 års radikala skilsmässolag.

Deras andra argumentationslinje går ut på att inflationen i formuleringen ”rätt till” förvisso är ett symptom på en bekymmersam tendens i vår samtid, men att denna utveckling inte springer ur de mänskliga rättigheternas förmenta ideologiska dominans. Tvärtom, menar författarna i Claude Leforts efterföljd, skapar mänskliga rättigheter förutsättningar för att motverka den privatisering av den offentliga sfären som formuleringen ”rätt till” är ett uttryck för.

Kombinationen av det starka inflytande som Leforts tänkande utövar på författarna och att Gauchet utgör deras primära måltavla, gör att böckerna, i synnerhet den från 2019, kan läsas som en förlängning av det meningsutbyte kring de mänskliga rättigheternas funktion i det moderna samhället som Gauchet och hans före detta läromästare Lefort initierade 1980. I essän ”Droits de l’homme et politique” från 1980 (omtryckt i essäsamlingen

L'invention politique 1981), formulerar Lefort ett försvar för de mänskliga rättigheterna rotat i en idé om politisk frihet. Han ville visa på vilket sätt mänskliga rättigheter hade spelat och alltjämt spelade en fundamental roll för en vital demokrati. Udden var riktad mot två positioner: dels mot de medialt mycket uppmärksammade så kallade ”nya filosoferna”, vilka såg mänskliga rättigheter som ett ramverk för att skydda sig dels mot politiken och staten; dels mot det marxistiskt inspirerade avfärdandet av mänskliga rättigheter som en ideologisk dimridå vilken döljer det borgerliga samhällets reella ojämlikheter.

Mot dessa uppfattningar artikulerade Lefort en tolkning av de mänskliga rättigheterna där han betonade hur de alltsedan de först proklamerades under 1700-talets andra hälft aldrig har fixerats, och att det är just denna rörlighet – att ständigt vara under diskussion – som ger dem deras specifikt politiska karaktär. I kraft av att vara under kontinuerlig omförhandling, pådriven av att etablerade tolkningar ifrågasätts på nytt och att tidigare exkluderade grupper reser nya anspråk, genererar de en politisk aktivitet och tvingar härigenom individerna att som politiska subjekt konfrontera varandra kring olika tolkningsfrågor. Diskussionerna kring deras innebörd har bidragit och bidrar alltjämt till att ge det moderna samhället sin karaktär av historisk föränderlighet. Hans försvar bottnar således inte primärt i det innehåll som de för tillfället är fyllda med, utan snarare i den politiska aktivitet och medborgaranda som diskussionerna om dem ger upphov till. Det är denna idé som utgör kärnan i Lacroix och Pranchères försvar av de mänskliga rättigheterna som själva navet i demokratin, här uppfattad som den politiska regim genom vilken människor kan åberopa sin, som Arendt formulerade det, ”rätt till rättigheter”. Det är också utifrån denna idé som de kritiserar Gauchet.

Det var med udden riktad mot Leforts idé som Gauchet först artikulerade sin kritik av de mänskliga rättigheternas nya ställning i det politiska livet år 1980 i uppsatsen ”Les droits de l'homme ne sont pas une politique”, i *La démocratie contre elle même* (2002). Gauchet skiljer här mellan mänskliga rättigheter som ett slags minimalt ramverk för det politiska handlandet och den ”maximalistiska” förståelse som han såg växa sig allt starkare mot slutet av 1970-talet, där politik reduceras till ett försvar av individens fri- och rättigheter. Det var mot den sistnämnda som han riktade sin kritik; genom att låta individens fri- och rättigheter tjäna som utgångspunkt för politisk mobilisering underminerar de förutsättningarna för såväl politiskt handlande som för de institutionella ramverk som på längre sikt borgar för individens fri- och rättigheter.

En annan aspekt av förskjutningen mot mänskliga rättigheter som övergripande politiskt mål som Gauchet vände sig emot, är att det både är ett symptom på och bidrar till vår växande oförmåga att orientera oss historiskt

och att föreställa oss framtiden som något annorlunda än det rådande. Den ”maximalistiska” förståelsen av mänskliga rättigheter länkas härigenom samman med nuets allt större betydelse på bekostnad av det förflutna och framtiden. Som Gauchet inskärper i den fjärde och sista delen i sin svit om demokratins tillkomst och utveckling, *L’avènement de la démocratie. IV, Le nouveau monde* (2017), är detta en dynamik som drivs på från två fronter: där vänstern värnar om att befria individen från olika strukturella hinder, försvarar högern en fri marknad. Libertariansk individualism, en stat vars yttersta syfte det är att skydda människors rättigheter samt en disciplinerande marknad kompletterar härigenom varandra. Territorialstatens försvagade ställning i kombination med söndervittrandet av socialismen som ett mot framtiden orienterat politiskt projekt har tillsammans möjliggjort framväxten av en nyliberal ordning. I kontrast till de visionära föresatser som beledsagade de moderna politiska rörelserna, har nyliberalismen vunnit terräng genom att successivt transformera samhällets olika sfärer i enlighet med marknadsprinciper för att sedan, med skenbart modest pragmatism, följa den riktning som summan av vår individuella valfrihet stakar ut. I dynamiken som underhåller denna illusion stärker den rättighetsskyddande staten och den disciplinerande marknaden varandra: båda bidrar de till att underminera förutsättningarna för framväxten av historiskt förankrade politiska subjekt som vill och kan ge den politiska gemenskap de tillhör en riktning in i framtiden.

Lacroix och Pranchères försök att vidareutveckla Leforts försvar av de mänskliga rättigheterna genom att sätta det i spel mot Arendt och ett flertal andra inflytelserika tänkare är mycket övertygande, särskilt i den första publikationen från 2016. I sin strävan att vederlägga Gauchets kritik är de emellertid inte lika framgångsrika. Även om de lyfter fram flera relevanta invändningar mot hur han argumenterat i vissa enskilda frågor och formuleringar, lyckas de inte på ett tillfredsställande sätt svara på två av de centrala utmaningarna i Gauchets argumentation.

För det första lyckas de inte visa vilka faktiska skillnader och likheter vi kan urskilja mellan hans position och de olika former av antimodern kritik som de redogör för i boken från 2016. Det hade till exempel varit intressant att pröva hur Gauchets position kan förstås i relation till de direkt modernitetskritiska invändningar mot de mänskliga rättigheternas sätt att verka i det moderna samhället, såsom de formulerats av exempelvis hans före detta kollega Manent i *La loi naturelle et les droits de l’homme* (2018), eller hos den brittiske teologen John Milbank. Båda två riktar in sig på de mänskliga rättigheternas oförmåga att inspirera till ändamål bortom försvaret för individens positiva såväl som negativa rättigheter och självbestämmanderätt. Hur kan vi förstå Gauchets kritik i relation till dessa invändningar? Har han svar på de svåra frågor om det moderna samhällets inre spänningar som

såväl Manent som Milbank formulerat? Detta får vi inget tydligt svar på i någon av böckerna.

Det andra problemet med Gauchets tänkande som de inte adresserar på ett adekvat sätt är hur, mera precist, vi bör förstå den idé om autonomi utifrån vilken han kritiserar den ”maximalistiska” ställning som de mänskliga rättigheternas fått i dagens liberala demokratier. Såväl författarna som Gauchet, och många andra med dem, se till exempel Samuel Moyns senaste bok *Not Enough. Human Rights in an Unequal World* (2018), är överens om att mänskliga rättigheter inte är tillräckliga för att skapandet av ett vitalt politiskt liv. Den intressanta frågan blir därför hur de själva relaterar till Gauchets svar på denna fråga. Den autonomiidé som han formulerat går ut på att skapa institutionella förutsättningar för formerandet av ett i historien förankrat politiskt subjekt som vill och kan ge en politisk gemenskap en riktning in i framtiden. Givet hur nära de trots allt ligger varandra i flera nyckelformuleringar är det synd att de inte ägnar mer energi åt att mer omsorgsfullt skriva fram på vilket sätt de vänder sig emot Gauchets förståelse.

Trots att de alltså finns punkter där författarna hade kunnat bli mer utförliga är Justine Lacroix och Jean-Yves Pranchères försök att formulera ett försvar av mänskliga rättigheter mycket läsvärt för alla med ett intresse både för rättighetsfrågor och för politisk teori i allmänhet. Särskilt intressanta är deras reflektioner eftersom de både försöker bemöta kritikerna av mänskliga rättigheter och skriva fram en egen position i närkamp med ett antal samtida till de mänskliga rättigheterna mer positivt inställda tänkare. På ett föredömligt vis praktiserar författarna precis det meningsutbyte som de, i Leforts efterföljd, föreställer sig att diskussionen kring mänskliga rättigheter ska generera.

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Where have you gone, Heinrich Wölfflin?

John D. Lyons (ed.): *The Oxford handbook of the Baroque*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xvii + 888 pp. ISBN 9780190678449, hbk.

Like true love and chronic back pain, some discussions in the historiography of science never go away entirely. Two decades ago in this journal, the intellectual historian Gunnar Eriksson published a learned, thought-provoking, and occasionally combative article which argued that the science of the seventeenth century should be understood as an integral component of what historians of the arts had long designated Baroque culture (“Begreppet barockvetenskap” in *Lychnos* 1999). In many ways, the argument was a

product of its time. The still young but already orthodox notion of the Scientific Revolution had come under increasingly heavy fire (e.g. Lindberg & Westman, eds., *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, 1990). The ongoing dissemination of Isaac Newton's unpublished writings on alchemy, biblical hermeneutics, and ancient wisdom spawned bold and innovative reinterpretations of the origins of modern science. The broad influence of Frances Yates' works served to make "Renaissance Science" a seductive and subversive watchword at graduate seminars from Berkeley to Uppsala. These works portrayed how scientific advancement had hinged on the contributions of figures formerly deemed peripheral or irrelevant, how modes of thought long disregarded as superstitious and irrational had laid the groundwork for modern intellectual culture, and more generally, demonstrated through their particular brand of Warburgian interdisciplinarity that the history of thought could be approached not only through the study of texts but through the interpretation of contemporary visual media, not least enigmatic imagery in the form of symbols, emblems, *imprese*, etc.

Inspired by these developments, and recognizing that the Yates Thesis had little meaningful to say about scientific activity after the disappearance of the Renaissance Magus, Eriksson argued for a "synchronic" approach to the history of seventeenth-century science, one that would redress the trail of anachronistic evaluations left in the wake of a teleologically-directed Whig history by viewing scientific thought and practice as the expressions of a more extensive contemporary cultural milieu. "Baroque Science" sought to investigate the ways in which once renowned and later derided figures such as Athanasius Kircher and Olof Rudbeck not only reflected but in some respects exemplified a scientific and scholarly space cohabited by Galileo, Descartes, and Boyle.

Eriksson's article was written in response to the Danish historian of science Jens Høyrup's critical review (*Physis* 24, 1997) of *The Atlantic Vision* (1994), the work in which Eriksson had introduced the concept "Baroque Science" to an international audience through a study of Rudbeck's infamous antiquarian opus *Atlantica* (1679–1702). In Høyrup's assessment, Eriksson's argument was "less than convincing" because despite his detailed presentation of Rudbeck's aims and methods, his discussion of the Baroque culture they represented rested on little more than subjective evaluations, fortuitous comparisons, and vague generalizations. This was a problem precisely because the status of the "Baroque" itself was a problem. Historians of the visual arts had a functional if contentious concept of Baroque culture to work with; historians of literature had another; historians of music a third. Overlap was partial and superficial. A convincing application of the "Baroque" to the history of science would have to do more than navigate through these discrepancies; it would have to begin by categorically defining the features

capable of allowing a work like Rudbeck's to be viewed as a characteristic expression of the culture of its time. Viewed in retrospect, the critique remains pertinent. To cite the "striking baroque character" of Newton's grave monument in Westminster Abbey without explaining the features that make the piece Baroque was ambiguous at best and misleading at worst, particularly when the monument in question, designed by the Palladianist William Kent in 1730, has at times been described as Neoclassical in style for similar purposes of contextual illustration (e.g. recently in Mordechai Feingold's *The Newtonian Moment*).

For Høyrup, in the end, the problem was not that there had been no Baroque science, but rather that Baroque science had not been a monolithic phenomenon, an ideal type against which particular instances of scientific thought and practice were to be evaluated. He characterized the seventeenth century as a period of transition marked by the uneasy coexistence of three scientific "orientations": on the one side, Renaissance holdovers unwilling to abandon the Neoplatonic view of an ensouled, magically infused cosmos governed by symbols; on the other, the forward-looking heralds of the classical science of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and situated between the two, like living specimens of Haeckel's hapless *Pithecanthropus*, "Baroque" muddleheads like Rudbeck and Kircher who had managed to assimilate some of the tools of the new science without understanding how to wield them consistently. The long histories of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment overlapped in the seventeenth-century, and the occasionally paradoxical nature of the period's science could be viewed as the symptom of an evolutionary schizophrenia that would only be resolved with the eventual triumph of the bourgeois public sphere of argumentation—*sensu* Habermas—in the later eighteenth century.

In his response, Eriksson was correct to note that Høyrup's depiction of vanguards and standpatters represented precisely the kind of whiggish retroassessment that the concept "Baroque science" sought to remedy, yet he neglected to address the review's justified call for a categorical definition comprised of a coherent set of cultural values, social attitudes, stylistic features, and conceptual markers that together could be recognized as constituting the spirit of the age. If a common *Zeitgeist* lay behind the appearance of the façade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Lully's motets, Milton's paradise, Vermeer's milkmaid, Vossius' natural law, and Huygens' pendulum, it remained frustratingly elusive.

Two decades later, one might expect a nearly nine-hundred-page volume entitled *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque* to bring some clarity to the question. Not only does it pick up the thread left dangling after the Eriksson-Høyrup exchange in its promise to explore the Baroque "as a historical, cultural, and intellectual concept," its broad interdisciplinary scope serves

to extend the discussion beyond the purview of "science" proper, covering many of the historical subfields that have become increasingly vital to intellectual history in the decades since, including the histories of sexuality, identity, legislation, technology, rituals, institutions, and emotions. Yet whether despite or owing to this welcome breadth, the picture of the Baroque that emerges is that of a contradictory, contentious, and ultimately elusive concept whose status as a viable epochal marker has never been more uncertain. In the introductory chapter, "The Crisis of the Baroque," John D. Lyons contends that not only was the historical period designated by the term "Baroque" characterized by an array of overlapping crises (spiritual, intellectual, political, etc.), the status of the term itself in scholarly discussions remains in "a perpetual crisis, a constant questioning of the meaning of this term and what purpose it serves" (1). In the following pages, which are not intended to serve as a review in the strict sense, I offer some reflections on the anthology's presentation of this crisis of the term and its continued historical utility.

One of the less compelling facets of Eriksson's thesis was his inability to clearly differentiate Baroque from Renaissance science. To his credit, he was conscious of the problem, and argued that despite the many continuities and correspondences that connected the two periods, the Baroque nevertheless possessed an unspecified scientific "spirit" (*anda*) of its own. However true this may be, it was not the kind of insight that could set the foundation for a research program, and the generation of intellectual historians he addressed skirted the problem of periodization, with more sense and less courage, by grouping the Renaissance and Baroque together as the "early modern" era. Lyons' introductory sketch of Baroque culture is marked by a similar failure to clearly demarcate the general characteristics of the epoch (generously defined here as "roughly 1550 to 1750") from those of its predecessor. Many if not all the themes and attributes he lists as characteristic of this culture (*admiratio*, exploration and discovery, "organization and display," crises of faith, the figure of the *theatrum mundi*, the recognition of a duplicity between inward experience and outward appearance) would appear on the surface to stem from the traditionally designated Renaissance, if not earlier. In this rendering, as in Eriksson's, the Baroque becomes a series of extensions of the Renaissance, a matter of degree rather than type.

While a difference of degree remains a difference, in the case of the historiographical viability of the Baroque as a period marker, the identification of a unique and unifying set of normative attributes seems particularly imperative. The notion of a "Baroque science" was and remains compelling because it seeks to situate scientific and scholarly thought and practice (formerly viewed as existing in an ideal space beyond historical contingency) squarely in the context of contemporary culture and society. It promises the kind of

deep contextualization provided by Science Studies without the latter's tendency to regress into sociological anonymity and hollow structuralism. Yet when the "Baroque" is translated across disciplinary boundaries, as it is in the thirty-eight chapters of the anthology, it is crucial that a recognizable interpretation of what it means to be Baroque survives the journey. In some respects, the viability of the Baroque is contingent on our ability to draw boundaries around it, to rein it in, to show the ways it can be understood as a unified whole, independent of the cultural epochs that preceded and followed it.

As it stands, Lyons' "rough" boundaries are permeable. He presents Loyola's *Exercitia spiritualia* (composed 1522–1524) as a kind of honorary Baroque work given both its theme and the circumstance that its author was canonized in 1622 (6). While the reasoning behind this association is appreciated (Høyrup, it can be noted, drew a similar parallel), chronological shuffling of this sort threatens to cause the already loose definition of the Baroque to unravel completely. If Loyola can meaningfully be viewed as Baroque due to his advocacy of "inward cultivation," then why not earlier Renaissance theoreticians of the *vita contemplativa* such as Petrarch and Ficino? I have little doubt that Lyons could supply a convincing answer. The issue is that the answer is not apparent here. The qualification that would allow us to recognize a distinction between Renaissance and Baroque debates on the "duplicity" of inwardness and outwardness needs to be proposed as an argument; a position needs to be taken. Without it, the "Baroque" serves as little more than a chronological specification within the vague expanse of the "early modern." If the Baroque is capable of bearing the heavy conceptual load Eriksson envisioned for it (and I share his optimism), then it continues to need its irritable border guards, like Erwin Panofsky, who nearly a century ago could berate the "misguided characters" who foolishly applied the term to Tintoretto and El Greco ("What is Baroque," 1934).

Naturally, the editorial introduction to a multiauthored anthology on a contested topic is not the place to draw rigid conceptual boundaries. Yet Lyons goes further in suggesting that the attempt to locate the Baroque in a collection of norms is a misguided enterprise from the outset, given that "What is baroque is irregular. It is problematic [. . .] something unsettled, something not normal, because the norms were themselves drastically contested" (17–18). This observation serves as something of a leitmotif for the anthology, where the Baroque is at times portrayed as a kind of anti-concept that can only be approached apophatically. It is thus "everything that Classicism is not," according to Hélène Merlin-Kajman (582). For Larry Norman, it gave "French Classicism a critical counterweight worthy of its prestige, an antithesis that dynamized its position in historical dialects, an Other against which to affirm its identity" (625). In some respects, this mode of

interpretation represents an evolution of the comparative formalism that characterized art historical discussions of the Baroque around the turn of the last century, where the formal features of Baroque art and architecture were conceived in relation to the more established historical categories "Renaissance" and "Neoclassicism." Baroque "painterliness," for example, was difficult to conceptualize without reference to Renaissance "linearity." Yet while Heinrich Wölfflin and other early theoreticians of the Baroque sought to locate the identity of the period in a cluster of normative forms, several of the authors in this volume lay emphasis on the essential formlessness of the Baroque. Katherine Ibbett and Anna More locate the constitutive feature of the Baroque in its ability to explode historical contextualization altogether: "As opposed to period styles that seem to seek stability, the baroque has most often been understood to be a style that produces, or expresses, contextual crises. The baroque thus, inherently, creates the possibility of critique of tradition, including periodization itself" (542).

To attempt to fix the Baroque as a normative standard is thus to misunderstand it. The Baroque emerges as the friction between the two poles of a pandemic crisis, oppositions variously defined throughout the book as "contradictions," "duplicities," "paradoxes," "antinomies." For Lyons, the Baroque is a dialectic movement fundamentally characterized by the "tension between irregularity and regularity, between the weight of the past and the free and energetic newness of the present, between the limitless and the limiting, between madness and reason" (17). "Baroque discourse," according to Christopher Johnson, "encompassed retrospective and prospective, deductive and inductive modes of thought, modes that in formal and stylistic terms could be pointed, elliptical, perspicacious, obscure, ornate, syncretic, digressive, and/or encyclopedic" (560). The plasticity of what counts as Baroque in this view appears to lead at times to the position that "anything goes." Remarking on the Neobaroque of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Monika Kaup asserts that "baroque expression can no longer be limited to a historical period or to the identitarian framework of a national literature: the baroque is resolutely cosmopolitan, polyglot, and transcultural [...] radically heterogenous and uncompromisingly pluralistic" (149).

At their best, statements such as these read as welcome reevaluations of a historical category that has traditionally been insensitive to diversity, whether in terms of race, religion, culture, class, or gender. We are reminded that the tradition of nineteenth-century *Kulturgeschichte* from which many of our epochal concepts derive coexisted with a chauvinistic worldview that played a significant role in the formation of those concepts. Moreover, such statements help to highlight the cultural dynamism at the heart of all historical eras, a dynamism that eludes categorical definition. Baroque culture was not something resolved, but always caught up in the process of resolving itself.

Yet just as often, these statements read as frustrating circumventions that leave little room for critical discussion. Periodization works by fixing boundaries. That these boundaries are artificial does not prevent them from being meaningful, even if that meaning is always a compromise. It can be recalled here that this process of finding order in disorder became a widespread compulsion during the Baroque. As Wölfflin showed, the complex, often disorienting dynamism of Baroque composition was staged precisely so that it could be resolved by a unifying element, in painting often in the form of strong, focused light. Unity (*Einheit*) was thus the necessary end of Baroque plurality. In the history of science, we see it in the development of universally binding laws of motion that replaced the Aristotelian dualism between the celestial and sublunary spheres. In the history of scholarship, we find it in those numerous attempts to uncover the primordial *Ursprache*, or to construct an artificial universal language, as a remedy for post-Babelian linguistic diversity. To our twenty-first century sensibility, the Baroque preoccupation with unity and order is often unsympathetic. The Baroque is, for political history, the Age of Absolutism. It is the era of witch-hunts, slave ships, the rise of biblical literalism, the codification of accepted knowledge through the publication of the *Ratio studiorum* (1599), the burning of Giordano Bruno. If one were to attempt to place a date on the commencement of the Baroque in Sweden, one could do worse than 1593, when the secular and ecclesiastical attendees of the Uppsala Synod established fixed and narrow boundaries for what counted as acceptable belief and practice. In many respects, "baroque expression" was radically homogenous and uncompromisingly dictatorial.

While thoughtful and informed, the discussion of the interdisciplinary viability of the Baroque as a period descriptor that runs throughout the chapters of this book reads as series of asterisks to a definition that is never given coherently. Here the Baroque is a problem with no postulate. Lyons' diplomatically inclusive presentation is certainly appropriate for an introduction to an anthology authored by forty scholars from a wide range of disciplines. But it does not satisfy the need for a common point of orientation on which a meaningful interdisciplinary dialogue could be grounded. This is often a problem for broadly thematic anthologies of this sort, though it is particularly pronounced here. Viewed in isolation, the chapters can be appreciated as learned and original contributions to scholarship on the period. But their discussions are for the most part self-contained, and when they do broach the more general "problem of the Baroque" they tend to speak past each other. Much of the benefit of bringing them together in an interdisciplinary volume is left unrealized.

One potential remedy would have been to include a chapter giving an interdisciplinary overview of the conceptual history of the "Baroque," from

its original formulation by the precocious Wölfflin, a student of Burckhardt, through its early expansions and revisions by Alois Riegl, August Schmarsow, and others, the challenge posed to it by "Mannerism," by "Rococo," its application to the histories of music and literature, its inclusions and exclusions in the more broadly defined "Age of Reason," its uneasy coexistence with the "Scientific Revolution," the "Radical Enlightenment," and so on. In *Lychnos* I am no doubt preaching to the choir when I suggest that any attempt to establish what the Baroque means for us today has to begin by taking into account what it has meant for others in the past. If Lyons and Co. are justified in questioning the viability of the Baroque as a platonic category, there is no challenging its status as a historical category.

It is clear that such a conceptual history of the Baroque would not follow an undivided and unswerving course. Kaup marvels at the "extraordinary flexibility of the baroque throughout its wayward history" (176). Yet what she looks on approvingly as a kind of democratic adaptability can equally be interpreted as reparable confusion. In an early attempt to account for historical inconsistencies in the use of the term ("Definitions of the Baroque in the Visual Arts," 1946), the art historian Wolfgang Stechow began by acknowledging the culpability of his own discipline in producing the confusion: "We [art historians] were the first to use the term, but we were also the first to make a mess of it." And yet he was confident that the continued use of the term in scholarship could be justified "provided an agreement on terminology can be reached, not only among art historians (which is no mean task), but among all of us." Stechow was not calling for the formation of a Signoria of elders elected from the various humanistic guilds to formulate a canonical definition of the Baroque. Rather, he was making the modest and still valid point that a certain degree of terminological clarity, precision, and consistency is necessary in order for meaningful and productive scholarly exchanges to occur, particularly at an interdisciplinary level. Eriksson was thinking along similar lines when he acknowledged that the ideal type is always by nature *overklig*, a kind of indispensable fiction against which *verkliga* historical actors and phenomena can be usefully compared and contrasted. Unlike a Platonic Idea, the epochal concept does not exist prior to experience, but rather emerges alongside empirical research in the form of a synthetic interpretation. For Stechow, it is thus always a working hypothesis, a provisional unity that evolves in response to the accumulation of evidence. Chronoscapes, like landscapes, mutate in response to human intervention.

While Stechow's call for a general conception of the Baroque comprised of positive attributes may have resounded with his mid-twentieth-century audience, the *Handbook* paints a gloomier picture of the potential for consensus in the present. As Merlin-Kajman observes, both correctly and regret-

tably, "Contemporary cultural history seems to have doubt as its primary spirit" (585). Yet alongside this skepticism something vital to historical scholarship is lost. As Wallace Ferguson put it in a similar context: "Even for specialists, some general notion of the character of the age they deal with, and of the relation of their own field of interest to the total complex of its civilization, seems to me essential. Without some such general conception, the specialist may well find himself operating in an historical vacuum, in which the gravity of all objects seems equal" ("The Interpretation of the Renaissance: Suggestions for a Synthesis," 1950). One can debate the extent to which the void Ferguson warned of has been realized, but it is clear that the image of the Baroque that emerges from the book is the product of a scholarly culture inherently suspicious of the "general conception." Certainly the spirit of critical engagement underlying this suspicion continues to serve as a vital channel connecting scholarship and society. Yet every now and then, I believe, we need a Wölfflin to come along to explain what matters most and why.

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