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Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xvi + 1066 pp. Notes, bibliography, illustrations, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-954820-0.

A Reply to Four Critics

Response essay by Jonathan Israel, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

To be confronted simultaneously with four lengthy, mostly critical reviews severely questioning a line of research and argument that has occupied over twenty years of one's life is a deeply sobering experience. But in the end nothing is better than well-grounded, constructive criticism, and as I have no desire to sound defensive but wish to be useful to the reader and, hopefully, to scholarship, I have resolved to concede every well-considered, empirically-grounded criticism without reserve and retrench accordingly, pruning back or renouncing every demonstrably defective argument of *Democratic Enlightenment*. I shall begin by summarizing for the reader the basic steps in terms of research and analysis, showing how and why the principal theses in *Democratic Enlightenment* emerged and the methodology behind it.

The book's genesis dates from 1992-4 when I began exploring the major intellectual controversies of the later Dutch Golden Age. These controversies, of which the biggest was the Balthasar Bekker furor (1691-94), provided fascinating material which lent initial shape to key elements of the subsequent framework. During 1992-94, while completing my *Dutch Republic* (1995), a basic template emerged at any rate for the early Enlightenment: from the 1650s, in the Netherlands, a republican, irreligious and freethinking philosophical underground developed, headed by Franciscus van den Enden, Adriaen Koerbagh, Lodewijk Meyer, and Spinoza, a philosophical culture remarkably creative and resilient that rejected "all supernatural agency, magic, disembodied spirits, and divine providence" while confronting an officially-sanctioned, theologically underpinned official culture. I myself contributed little that was original, mostly just summarizing the research of others, principally Dutch and German colleagues to whose work I was (and still am) greatly beholden—Wim Klever, Wiep van Bunge, Manfred Walther, Winfried Schröder, and, later, Michiel Wielema, Wijnand Mijnhardt, and Henri Krop.[1] None of these contested, or has since, the essential duality characterizing the remarkable early Enlightenment tableau their work so vividly illustrates.

This scenario, all experts agree, centered around a battle over religious authority in the first place, but also over the dissident underground republicanism and toleration theory that resulted. An intellectual underground clashed fundamentally with those reformers in the churches seeking to balance religion and science in a new enlightened manner, the latter building initially on Descartes but, after 1700, increasingly on Locke and Newton. The rift, religious, scientific, philosophical, and political, persisted into the eighteenth century and remained central to the Republic's overall intellectual history. However, this framework, largely unfamiliar to British and American scholars, conflicts with many prevailing assumptions in Anglo-American historiography, in particular the presumed overriding centrality of the English background to the early Enlightenment. It is obvious to anyone studying this debate that English influences played little part in Dutch developments before around 1710. While I contributed nothing much to the analysis of ideas, I did try to contextualize the research more widely than the others as this was requisite for the general history of the Dutch Republic I was completing. Focusing on intellectual controversies that caught the public eye, highlighting topics, themes, and arguments to

which society at the time was particularly sensitive, I adopted a method diverging from how intellectual historians usually proceed that I afterwards pursued further and called the “controversialist method.”

Investigating not just “context” in the usual sense of texts, ideas, and debates in the manner of the “Cambridge school” but rather the social history of debates, looking at the law cases, political reactions, city government resolutions, church council records, sermons, and newspaper and journal reviews connects social and intellectual history closely together. My aim was to chart history of ideas as integral to social and political history, delving into the social functions of ideology, focusing on how and why particular standpoints seemed especially sensitive, relevant, or controversial at a given time. Critics have pronounced this “highly unoriginal.” Perhaps it is; yet, this rarely practiced method offers invaluable lessons showing what contemporaries judged significant in intellectual debates and how they formulated their responses and disagreements. Several critics nevertheless managed to infer that I am simply plying the “old intellectual” history. In fact, the chain of “influence” scheme underlying the old intellectual history is anathema to me and was systematically eschewed in my approach.

The second stage owed even less to my own research. From the 1670s to the 1730s, an extensive French-language “clandestine philosophical literature,” radiating from Holland around western Europe, formed a second clear phase of polarity and division in the general intellectual scene. Forbidden texts in which often highly simplified bits of Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle, and others were reworked, usually by dissident Huguenot refugees, into fiercely irreligious tracts attacking Revelation, belief in the miraculous, and ecclesiastical authority proliferated. These clandestine manuscripts in French, a substantial body of subversive tracts scattered in Europe’s archives and libraries of which the *Traité de Trois Imposteurs* (probably dating from the 1670s) was the most notorious, had an appreciable impact in restricted (often aristocratic libertine) circles in France as well as Holland, Germany, and Italy. When I first incorporated this topic into my emerging Radical Enlightenment construct, in 1992-94, the pre-eminent experts were Gianni Paganini,[2] Antony McKenna, Silva Berti, and Miguel Benítez; and the same scholars still preside. One major result, demonstrated especially by McKenna and also Gianluca Mori,[3] was that Bayle’s late oeuvre, contrary to what the earlier standard Bayle scholarship assumed, closely fits with this non-skeptical, underground rationalizing radical tendency.

Restricted mainly to manuscript initially, eventually this clandestine literature came to be more widely disseminated in printed form, most conspicuously from the 1730s in the philosophical correspondence of Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d’Argens (1703-71). The legacy, manuscript and printed, of this French-language second stage based on Holland is extensive. A new journal, *La Lettre clandestine*, was established to edit, analyze, and discuss it; and a lively debate ensued about subsidiary issues, including over how extensive Spinoza’s presence in this literature is. But no expert on the clandestine philosophical literature either then or now challenges the overall conclusion that the early Enlightenment of 1670-1730 in French, like that in Latin and Dutch, presents two distinct and antagonistic faces: one an underground subversive philosophical culture, deriding religious authority, Revelation, miracles, and the clergy, and demanding full freedom of expression, as well as attempting to forge a new secular morality independent of religious authority; the other, officially sanctioned and condemning the underground Enlightenment, creating a fundamental antagonism and duality.

Empirically, all this has now long been firmly established. Even with regard to Bayle, Mori’s and McKenna’s far-reaching revisionism prevails among specialists. But there is nevertheless still a problem: awareness of this French-language underground counter-culture remains, even today, largely absent in Britain and North America and again clashes with basic assumptions. Anthony Pagden’s recent *The Enlightenment and why it still matters* (2013) glaringly illustrates this now huge deficiency in awareness, omitting all discussion of the clandestine literature and quite wrongly assuming British developments are the sole significant focus for this early period.[4] Britain was considerably less central to the European Enlightenment between 1650 and 1750 than practically all Anglo-American scholars assume, even if, after 1700, Locke and Newton dominated the tendency reconciling religious authority with

science and scholarship. Bayle scarcely concerned himself with English developments at all. For the early Enlightenment Holland thus looked more crucial in some respects than England or France, especially for the emergence of the purely secular, philosophical and republican tendency eliminating miracles and Revelation and demanding a broad non-theological toleration. Admittedly, this is not a conclusion likely to be readily accepted. There is a massive inherited intellectual culture orientated against it. But it has not been effectively argued against, and I do not think it can be.

Stemming from these findings, chapter three of *Democratic Enlightenment*, among the book's anchor chapters, shows the fight over whether or not to suppress the *Encyclopédie* as religiously and politically 'dangerous', the battle of the *Encyclopédie* (1750 -65), was bitter, prolonged, and political. It was one in which the enlighteners themselves divided, with some, like the Swiss enlighteners Albrecht Haller and Charles Bonnet, supporting suppression. This 'war of the *Encyclopédie*', contends *Democratic Enlightenment*, is best understood as an extension of the basic polarity established for the age of clandestine literature in Dutch and French. None of our four critics discusses my analysis of the war over the *Encyclopédie*. Armenteros does remark that I proceed here 'without providing proof'; but given that *Enlightenment Contested* and *Democratic Enlightenment* together present sixty-seven pages of detailed evidence, none of which she contests, that Locke's harmonizing philosophy was demolished under pretense of being upheld, this comment seems totally inexplicable.[5] Her dismissive remark notwithstanding, the central contention that the *Encyclopédie* was deliberately, if mostly underhandedly, infused by Diderot with a powerfully anti-theological and intermittently anti-monarchical strain other enlighteners repudiated thus far stands intact.

Since the stages explained above all revolve around the same profound division, it seemed logical to investigate next, for the period after 1765, the sometimes little studied Enlightenment debates dealing with the same questions that shaped the earlier dichotomy. Are reason and science the exclusive source of truth, or are there two distinct sources—reason and religious authority—that must be harmonized? Do natural disasters like the Lisbon earthquake (1755) demonstrate divine intention or stem from purely natural causes? These are either/or questions scarcely lending themselves to a spectrum of nuances. Linked to this was my discovery that in his correspondence and (comparatively neglected) writings of the 1770s Voltaire consistently views the High Enlightenment as fundamentally divided, between those like himself and d'Alembert, championing the existing social order and attacking only "the priests," and *philosophes* like Diderot, d'Holbach, Boulanger, and the young Condorcet, depicting the people as victims of "two classes of civil and sacred tyrants," kings *and* priests. No more than Hume or Rousseau do I consider Voltaire to have languished, as Armenteros purports, in a "realm of invariable moral, political, and intellectual impotence and inferiority"; I portray him rather as a towering figure and effective Enlightenment leader. In any case, Voltaire's bitter complaint that d'Holbach's *Système de la nature* split the *philosophes* down the center, and at Paris "partage tous les esprits" like a Versailles minuet,[6] plainly fits the duality thesis not the spectrum model championed in the past by most historians.

I say "in the past" because the older historiography mostly ignored the early Enlightenment (1650-1730) and also the late Enlightenment era (1789-1820) dominated by the split between revolutionary and anti-revolutionary views. Furthermore, the older historiography ignores another sizeable segment we now accommodate. David Sorkin, Mark Curran, and others have shown that most French Catholic apologists attacking Diderot, d'Holbach, and the *Encyclopédie* in the later eighteenth-century, most notably Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1715-90) and Adrien Lamourette (1742-94), despite being at war with the *encyclopedistes*, belong to the (moderate) Enlightenment.[7] "Labeling them, 'enemies of the Enlightenment,'[8] as Darrin McMahon has," concludes Curran, "is certainly unhelpful." [9] Correcting McMahon's mistake emphatically distances the French Catholic Enlightenment from Counter-Enlightenment publicists like François-Xavier de Feller (1735-1802) but, equally, from enlighteners repudiating religious authority. Given that these three deep rifts all ultimately reduce to one, the spectrum image has become utterly redundant, hopelessly vague, and superficial.

As Voltaire himself observed, the deep split he discerned among enlighteners provoked considerable dispute about who exactly needed enlightening. Enlighteners defending monarchy and aristocratic dominance of society, like himself and Frederick the Great, and in different ways also Rousseau and the Catholic apologists, did not believe that the people needed redeeming from “ignorance” or that more than a select elite could be enlightened. Radical enlighteners held that everyone has an equal need and right to become enlightened. Here again the polarity pattern, not the spectrum thesis, applies: what meaningful in-between position *could* there be? To ascribe to the radical enlighteners “aspirations that could be achieved only in industrial economies,” objects Chisick, “is misconceived. Social democracy is an ideal not of the eighteenth century but of the nineteenth and even more the twentieth century and cannot well be separated from socialism, which was hardly present in the Enlightenment.” But here he is assuredly mistaken. Condorcet, Mirabeau, Lantenas, Lakanal, and numerous others proclaimed an overriding, urgent need for universal secular education to enlighten all of society—as did indeed Robert Coram in America.[10] Without transforming how most people think, freeing men from “prejudice” and “superstition,” the essential pre-condition for preventing kings aristocrats and priests oppressing the majority, concurred also Brissot, Volney, and Tom Paine, no democratic republic can thrive. There is no reason to suppose resources available for social welfare in 1830 or 1840 significantly exceeded those of 1790. Of course, early socialists in the 1830s and 1840s *were* frequently deemed “utopian” by onlookers, including the Marxists. But that does not render them any less a historical reality.

This drive to enlighten society as a whole, endeavoring to subdue “superstition,” “prejudice,” monarchy and “priestcraft” across the board, also further illustrates the link between challenging religious authority and attacking kings and aristocracy. While my critics deny a necessary connection between eliminating religious authority and political subversion, the early Enlightenment evidence, the *Encyclopédie* battle and Voltaire’s stance, all suggest the opposite. *Philosophes* claiming mankind was being exploited by an alliance of kings *and* priests, such as Boulanger, Diderot, d’Holbach, Helvétius, Condorcet, etc., were broadly the same as those denying the existence of a deity governing the world and the course of human affairs. This is factually the case and also possesses a clear philosophical logic. Eliminating divine sanction and priestly authority from the moral and legal order compels thinkers, unless they lapse into an anarchic immoralism, to follow Spinoza in redefining the moral order on the basis of a secular universalism, viewing the common good in a purely non-theological fashion, treating everyone equally, and predicating full toleration and freedom of expression. By no means all individual atheistic materialists followed this path; but, if there is to be a moral and legal order at all, the general tendency *has* to. Hence, combating monarchical tyranny, aristocratic dominance, and ecclesiastical privilege to prevent governments and vested interests preying on society is not just occasionally or accidentally, but rather inextricably, tied, both factually *and* philosophically, to repudiating religious authority.

Where early eighteenth century philosophical subversion of the existing structures of authority was plied by clandestine philosophical manuscripts restricted to small circles, by the 1770s and 1780s a new stage commenced: a torrent of published literature diffused multiple illicit editions on a massive scale. Mostly anonymous, these widely-selling, often multi-volume major syntheses were heavily indebted to the earlier French-language clandestine literature. This new generation of forbidden texts systematically assailed religion together with existing morality, law, and institutions and traditional ideas about education, sexuality, colonial expansion, and economic life. Foremost among these were the *Système de la nature* (1770), *Histoire philosophique des Deux Indes* (1770), *Le Bon-Sens* (1772), *La Politique naturelle* (1773), *Système social* (1773), *la Morale universelle* (1776), and Helvétius’ *De l’Homme* (1773). While Diderot, d’Holbach, and Helvétius were the three principal authors generating this intellectual revolution prefiguring comprehensive social and political revolution, others prominently participated, among them Naigeon, Saint-Lambert, and Raynal.

As the radical tendency's political thought became more pervasive and sophisticated during the 1770s and 1780s, the basic duality in question evinced yet another dimension. Moderates, following Montesquieu and Voltaire, were invariably passionate Anglophiles eulogizing the British model, powerfully urging mixed government dominated by aristocracy and crown as the correct basis for reform. The radical stream rejected the British model, insisting on the indispensability for their secular moral egalitarianism, and the "happiness" of all, of untrammelled supremacy of the legislature within a republican and democratic framework. The logic of their repudiating mixed government and constitutional monarchy, and its connection to the anti-exploitation and anticolonial politics of Diderot, d'Holbach, Raynal, and Helvétius, is vividly conveyed by Brissot's remark of 1783: "dans les monarchies limitées le problème le plus important à résoudre en politique, c'est de trouver un moyen d'empêcher que ceux qui n'ont aucune part au gouvernement ne deviennent la proie de ceux qui les gouvernent." [11]

From the 1750s, no historian disputes, the Enlightenment inspired a widespread reform movement backed by Europe's royal courts, most vigorously in Prussia, Russia, France, Spain, Habsburg Austria, Denmark-Norway, and Sweden. However, this general reform movement, supported by virtually all enlighteners, failed to accomplish most of its program, being unable to secure even a comprehensive toleration and extensive legal reform, as all would-be reformers were kept within strict bounds: the principles of monarchy, social hierarchy, and religious authority remained sacrosanct. No proposed reform could be publicly promoted if these limits were breached, for example by demanding full, unqualified toleration, elimination of aristocracy or ecclesiastical privilege, or in Poland and Russia advocating suppression of serfdom. Not coincidentally, after around 1785, the initial enthusiasm of many radical enlighteners (Brissot, Gorani, and Condorcet among them) for enlightened despots rapidly cooled.

To complete *Democratic Enlightenment's* argument an obvious final step followed. Contemporary commentators, conservative or not, practically always explained the French Revolution, like the reform movement of the 1770s and 1780s, as the work of "modern philosophy." The proposition that it was the radical tendency that principally shaped the sweeping reform enactments of the French Revolution hence arose logically. It is an excellent maxim of historical method to explore how contemporaries understood a great event. The near unanimous claim from 1789 down to 1848 that "modern philosophy" caused the Revolution cannot be ignored by any scholar. If contemporaries often made little effort to define the "modern philosophy" to which they attributed the revolutionary upsurge, we also find numerous instances, in the writings of Portalis, Necker, De la Harpe, Burke, and Rehberg, for example, that *do* specify what kind of "philosophy" engineered the Revolution. Such writers tie the revolutionary tendency in Europe to a cumulative tradition of thought emanating from Diderot, d'Holbach, Helvétius, Raynal, Mably, Rousseau (in some respects), and Boulanger. However contemptuous, Edmund Burke was not wrong to remark, in 1790 in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, "I hear on all hands that a cabal, calling itself philosophic, receives the glory of many of the late proceedings; and that their opinions and systems are the true actuating spirit of the whole of them." Comparably, England too, he added, had its Collinsets, Tolands, and Tindals, only the British "atheists and infidels" lacked the pervasive impact of their French counterparts. [12]

Given the weight of contemporary opinion attributing the European revolutions to "modern philosophy" of an atheistic and democratic republican stamp, applying the categorization arrived at for the period 1650-1790 to the ideological maelstrom of the revolutions was in no way an improbable or risky hypothesis. On the contrary, it showed every sign of providing better explanations for the principal twists and turns, the convoluted politics, of the Revolution than the far more widely preferred "social" and "cultural" interpretations I criticized. Classified in terms of its intellectual history, the French Revolution naturally divides into three separate streams, three distinct revolutions. [13] There was a constitutional monarchist revolutionary bloc demanding the British model, Montesquieu, and aristocratic dominance, striving through 1789-91 to check the democratic republican tendency but eventually (by late 1791) marginalized. There was the democratic republican "real revolution"

trumpeting Radical Enlightenment ideology that matured since the 1770s, supplemented by perceptions of the American Revolution of which Brissot, Condorcet, Pétion, Lafayette, and Carra were all close observers. The democratic republicans aimed to replace the ancien régime with an uncompromisingly secular equality, eliminating aristocratic dominance, privilege, and monarchy, as well as religious authority, church property, and education by clergy. They rejected every law or institution from the past as illegitimate: everything must begin anew consonant with their revolutionary equality and new moral order based on enlightening everyone. Lastly, there was the populist authoritarian Revolution rooted in a simplified Counter-Enlightenment Rousseauism, headed by Marat, Robespierre, and Saint-Just, aiming at dictatorship, extinguishing dissent, and suppressing freedom of the press and expression.

The Terror was exclusively the work of this last faction, which in Robespierre's case eventually, if reluctantly, by late 1791 professed to be "republican" but was actually ferociously intolerant, anti-republican, and anti-democratic. The authors of the Terror succeeded in crushing the "real revolution" between June 1793 and July 1794. But *Robespierreism* was almost totally dismantled after Thermidor, and in the period 1795-99, a neo-Brissotin revival—albeit stripped of much of its previous zeal for democracy—dominated the faltering Revolution and, despite its failures, also registered successes particularly in keeping privilege, hereditary aristocracy, and ecclesiastics out of the army, education, and the administration. Although historians mostly discern profound differences between the American and French Revolutions, in several respects there was actually a deep affinity. Both became ideological battlegrounds, culminating in the United States in the 1790s, reflecting the deep antagonism between what Henry May in his authoritative *The Enlightenment in America* (1976) designated "moderate Enlightenment" and "revolutionary Enlightenment." Obviously this split in North America closely paralleled (and further confirms) the extended polarity thesis explained above. For adherents of the revolutionary Enlightenment in the United States, represented by Tom Paine and his followers including Coram, the post-1775 Franklin, Jefferson in the main, and (especially regarding slavery) Lafayette, the Revolution did not end in 1783. There was much that remained unaccomplished not least in countering informal aristocracy, establishing adult male white democracy, and emancipating the blacks.

These are the arguments of *Democratic Enlightenment* correctly stated. What then of the role I assign to Spinoza about which all the critics loudly complain. Wright, Armenteros, Dale Van Kley,^[14] and others protest that I create a "false idol," exaggerating the "role of Spinoza out of all proportion." But I am *not* maintaining that Spinoza's exerted a towering active "influence" through the power of ideas. I am pointing out that if eliminating religious authority is as closely linked to introducing a universal secular morality and democratic order as the evidence clearly indicates, then it follows that Spinoza possesses a special significance in Enlightenment history. First to erect a rigorous philosophical framework eliminating miracles, Revelation and ecclesiastical tutelage, reconstituting ethics on the basis of secular equality alone, and urging democracy as the political form best reflecting these perspectives, he forged a paradigm the entire subsequent Radical Enlightenment, consciously or unknowingly, broadly followed. Whether or not Spinoza directly "influenced" any particular subsequent writer or group his philosophy's role as the defining chief marker of the radical tendency, repeatedly acknowledged by Voltaire in his late writings, is an empirical fact explicable in terms of political and social developments.

Now I am resigned to being depicted as an irritating, "bumptious," and "dogmatic" historian, pouring out useless verbiage, bombarding readers with what Wright terms "hypertensive vocabulary," "spastic syntax," and "manipulative capitalization" underpinning "weightless vagaries." I am content to be judged altogether unoriginal as well as shockingly lacking in deference towards universally admired heroes of scholarship like Furet, Darnton, and Baker, even though it is surely legitimate and useful if a dissenting voice seeks to demonstrate the shortcomings of their ubiquitously venerated views where these appear to clash with what looks like plain evidence. I do not mind being rebuked for a hundred and one deficiencies, provided the criticism also engages seriously with the principal arguments *Democratic Enlightenment* puts forward.

To what extent do these critiques genuinely challenge my main arguments? Carolina Armenteros agrees with other critics that I am “categorizing thinkers within a pre-set model of Enlightenment” and tend to oversimplify and iron out nuances. But her criticism harbors serious inaccuracies weakening her indictment to the point that it fails to confront my principal theses. My scheme is unable, she suggests, to accommodate in-between instances. Yet I have no quarrel with anything she says concerning William Jones as a hybrid case. Instances like those of Rousseau and La Harpe combining features of both Enlightenment streams abounded; so did admixing incompatible Counter-Enlightenment ingredients, switching from one side to the other, and attempting simultaneously to hold views characteristic of both.

Mainstream Christianity, complains Armenteros, I identify “with the Counter-Enlightenment,” as “the agent of abusive elites” while I neglect to acknowledge the outstanding achievement of the Abbé Grégoire as a radical emancipator. But I align Christianity principally with the “moderate Enlightenment” and only secondarily with the Counter-Enlightenment. Christianity was undoubtedly a major agent of moderate reform in the later eighteenth century. Nor do I deny that several impressive individuals strove to reconcile Christianity also with the radical tendency. These were often Unitarians or near-Unitarians like Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, but not exclusively so. During the French Revolution, Henri Grégoire, Claude Fauchet, and Adrien Lamourette, all Catholic ecclesiastics, were outstanding in combining Christianity’s core values with egalitarianism, freedom of expression, democracy, emancipation of blacks and Jews, as well as subordinating church to state in politics and law-making. However, in forging a Christian radical tendency, these remarkable men ran into massive contradictions imposed by their own stance—not least unrelenting condemnation from the papacy, episcopate, and nearly the entire Catholic Church. By 1792-93, they were hopelessly isolated and embroiled with all three main competing ideological streams infusing the Revolution, the *parti de philosophie* no less than the moderates and authoritarian populists.[15]

Criticizing my thesis concerning the “radical triumvir of Diderot, Helvétius, and d’Holbach,” Armenteros contends that not only was this composed “of thinkers who (unlike Rousseau) were not primarily political thinkers, but also thinkers who were politically divided among themselves. Diderot wrote a *Réfutation d’Helvétius*, where he reflects on political matters, that goes curiously unmentioned in *Democratic Enlightenment*” where, allegedly, I offer “no detailed and systematic analysis of the political thought of the triumvir beyond their common subversive attitudes and anti-Rousseauian precepts.” This is all highly inaccurate. In the *Histoire philosophique, Système social*, and *La politique naturelle*, as well as several key *Encyclopédie* articles, and elsewhere, Diderot and d’Holbach *were* primarily functioning as political thinkers. The fact most historians of political thought do not consider them such is irrelevant. My exposition of their crypto-republican, anti-aristocratic, anti-colonial, “general will,” and emancipatory views occupies considerable space in chapter ten, pp. 270-8; chapter fifteen, pp. 413-42; chapter twenty-two, pp. 619-26, chapter twenty-three, pp. 635-40; chapter thirty, pp. 808-20; and chapter thirty-five, pp. 938-43. Far from being “unmentioned,” Diderot’s *Réfutation d’Helvétius*, is discussed on pp. 667-9, where I show that this text refutes only secondary strands of Helvétius’ materialism and education theory that Diderot judged too crudely formulated. He sought refinements to Helvétius’ scheme but applauded the general orientation of his crypto-republican thought, indeed, says he rates Helvétius very highly as a thinker, and far above Rousseau.

Armenteros is right to say that Rousseau’s general will is close genealogically to Spinoza’s “common good” but wrong to suppose it closer than Diderot’s or d’Holbach’s “general will.” Nor is there anything “ironic” about this; it is simply something historians generally fail to grasp. Despite being a promoter of the “general will” concept, Diderot, objects Armenteros, “may have approved of republics even less than ‘moderates’ like Montesquieu: the *Voyage en Hollande* pointed to modern republics like Venice and the Netherlands as unviable alternatives to monarchies, both because they were corrupt and because the latter resembled a monarchy due to the Stadholder’s power.” Here she has clearly misunderstood my argument. All radical thinkers disdained, or as with Van den Enden, Wekhrlin, Tom Paine in his *Rights*

of *Man*, and Condorcet and Paine together in their short-lived journal *Le Républicain* (1791), openly disparaged aristocratic and patrician republics like Geneva, Venice, Genoa, Berne, Zurich, and the Dutch Republic (especially after the Orangist revolution of 1747-48), which by definition violated their overriding political principle: philosophy's task is to prevent elites and vested interests preying on the majority.

Armenteros deplores my denying "any political theoretical continuity between the ancien regime and the National Assembly" of 1789: "just as Israel shifts most of the Enlightenment's thinkers to the right, he shifts the National Assembly—along with its intellectual inspiration, the *Encyclopédie*—to the left, thus offering an exceptionally polarized portrait of the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment." This assertion about the National Assembly is completely untrue. "Royalist thought of the 1780s," she adds, "also demonstrates that well before the Revolution, the views of the monarchy's supporters were moving in an anti-absolutist direction." Indeed; but here Armenteros has again simply misconstrued. There was unquestionably much continuity between the ancien regime and the ideas of most National Assembly deputies. But that is not what *Democratic Enlightenment* is about. My clearly stated objective is to explain how a small fringe who briefly captured the Revolution dogmatically refused the legitimacy of any law or institution inherited from the past and insisted on starting everything anew from scratch.[16] Such a phenomenon was unprecedented in history. If there is a better explanation than the Radical Enlightenment, I would like to hear it.

Harvey Chisick is a historian of the revolutionary press and an excellent scholar whom I admire. But we disagree sharply on certain issues. I was amused to read that Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is "the sort of thing one might expect from a Cartesian." The idea that a Cartesian would include a chapter denying the possibility of miracles and the miraculous or would devote most of his text to divesting Scripture of any divine status and denying the existence of religious authority seems improbable in the extreme. What Chisick says about Montesquieu is equally incorrect. He states that "Israel sees [Montesquieu] as a defender of the Old Regime." Actually, parts of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748) were considered highly subversive and Spinozistic especially at first; however, by the late eighteenth century, while he remained a major influence among moderate reformers, Montesquieu was also often selectively employed by reactionary aristocrats, churchmen, and Caribbean slave-owners as a defensive weapon against radical ideas.[17] That is very different from what Chisick alleges.

I know Chisick's intention, as in his two earlier critiques,[18] is to be accurate and fair. Yet his argument in all three critiques contains considerable misrepresentation, especially in asserting, "Jonathan Israel maintains that single-substance materialism necessarily implies progressive politics and socially responsible values." Materialist metaphysics, I argue, overthrows religious authority, creating a basis "indispensable to the rise of a generalized radical outlook." [19] That such a metaphysic could fail to produce a progressive politics is amply demonstrated not just by La Mettrie but equally d'Alembert and also Goethe who, in the 1780s, was a passionate Spinozist yet no radical reformer. Materialism, Armenteros correctly observes, does not under my scheme "automatically entail egalitarianism or sympathy for revolt." Rather, I contend that such a metaphysic *was* a necessary precondition; but progressive politics was *not* a necessary consequence, something quite different from what Chisick alleges. Sade and La Mettrie, moreover, are wrongly cited (as they often are), as evidence the Radical Enlightenment construct is "invalid." As Winfried Schröder demonstrates in his contribution to the May 2013 conference in Brussels ("The Radical Enlightenment: the Big Picture and the Detail"), while Sade did pay lip-service to d'Holbach's atheism, he rejected the rule of reason, welfare of the majority, treating the happiness of each as of equal value, etc., and hence lacks any real connection with the Radical Enlightenment; equally, La Mettrie, as explained in *Enlightenment Contested*, notwithstanding his Spinozistic metaphysics, stands outside as regards his moral, social, and political thought.[20]

The people, states Chisick, "posed a serious challenge for the thinkers of the Enlightenment, something that Peter Gay recognized" and Harry Payne and Benoît Garnot elaborated on. I entirely agree.[21] He

is wrong to add, though, that here is an aspect “Jonathan Israel overlooks.” Quite the contrary, the whole debate over enlightening everyone, or enlightening just a small elite, bears directly on this. Whether ordinary folk support revolution or counterrevolution, held the radicals, was principally a matter, as the French revolutionary paper *La Feuille villageoise* expressed it, in late 1790, of whether enlightenment or “superstition” dominates their thinking.[22] I nowhere suggest the radicals greatly respected the common people’s judgment as such. Rather, I affirm that they did not believe democracy viable until society becomes “enlightened,” meaning subject to the rule of reason. If I emphasize this insufficiently for Chisick in *Democratic Enlightenment*, I stress it still more in *Revolutionary Ideas*.

“Where, exactly,” inquires Chisick, imputing vagueness, is the “line separating moderate revolutionaries” from the radicals drawn?[23] *Democratic Enlightenment* elaborates a whole set of demarcation lines: Is all of society to be enlightened or only part of it? Is religious authority to be proscribed or compromised with? Should toleration be comprehensive or partial? Should royal power continue under constitutional limits, or disappear? Is aristocratic dominance legitimate or illegitimate? Should some laws and institutions survive, or all be discarded? The differentiation seems abundantly clear. Chisick rightly spots, though, a contradiction between my stating early in *Democratic Enlightenment* (p.31) that both Enlightenment streams were “revolutionary,” whereas on page 941, I affirm the moderate stream was “inherently anti-revolutionary.” This *is* indeed an error of expression. Moderate Enlightenment, I should have restated, was revolutionary too but in a more limited fashion. Chisick is mistaken, though, to suggest the second (incorrect) formulation “better reflects the general tenor of Israel’s argument than the earlier one.” Liberal monarchism’s strength as a rival ideology, aiming to balance a slimmed-down *ancien regime* with extensive reform, proves moderate Enlightenment also possessed impressive revolutionary credentials—as proven earlier in the Glorious Revolution of 1688—albeit of a less sweeping kind than the democratic republican Revolution. Napoleon’s dictatorship restored the Catholic Church’s influence in a reduced format, ended freedom of the press and legislature supremacy, and re-introduced black slavery in the colonies, besides revising the marriage laws to end gender equality. To this extent he rejected the Radical Enlightenment; but he simultaneously persisted with extensive legal, administrative and educational reforms, an approach that might be termed moderate Enlightenment armed to the teeth and militarized.

Before proceeding further, I must strenuously rebut Chisick’s charge that I argue ideas “move through society in a direct or unobfuscated manner.” Quite the contrary. Society, my “controversialist method” insists, is *never* interested in the undiluted reflections of thinkers but, rather, invariably selective, even relentless in distorting the meaning of their thoughts. Darnton, Chartier, Jacob, Goodman, Roche, Lilti, and others err in my estimation not in claiming ideas are refracted, modified, used selectively, ignored, and twisted—that is all too true, but because they hardly engage with ideas at all or, like Lilti, discuss them only in a highly reductive, dismissive manner, largely erasing them from the picture.[24] A striking instance, as Jeremy Popkin, Daniel Gordon, Elisabeth Eisenstein, and Mark Curran, also all observe, is Darnton’s treatment of d’Holbach whose books regularly topped his lists of the most widely selling clandestine texts, an astounding fact which, however, he completely ignores.[25]

Like Wright and Armenteros, Chisick sternly criticizes my “account of the Revolution as the work of a ‘tiny’ group of thinkers and *philosophes-révolutionnaires* who succeeded by dint of their ideas and convictions in implementing the program of the Radical Enlightenment.” But this again misleadingly formulates my position. Radical ideas do *not* explain the radicals’ successes. Most participants in the Revolution had little sympathy for the radical fringe. It was divisions among the royalists, moderates, and (later) the populists, I argue, and deteriorating socio-economic circumstances intensifying economic distress, that created the opening, enabling the republican faction wielding radical ideas, temporarily—with extensive but fickle support—to predominate during 1789-93 and 1795-99. Armenteros perceives a “double paradox” in a “philosophy distinguished by its anti-teleological positions [being] teleologically determined by the superior power of its own, anti-teleological ideas.” But since the Radical

Enlightenment was ultimately defeated in the 1790s, continually frustrated in the nineteenth century, and blighted in much of the twentieth, it is hard to appreciate her logic.

Chisick's complaint that "according to [Israel] the French Revolution is the working out of the ideas of the Radical Enlightenment, and these ideas are often treated as if it were sufficient to follow their logical implications to explain the Revolution" is simply Van Kley's error yet again, a travesty of my argument. To this misrepresentation, and Chisick's even more fallacious suggestion that I am "accepting the judgments of reactionary critics of the Enlightenment and French Revolution at face value," I shall return at the conclusion when listing current false "objections" given formidable traction by being constantly repeated in the burgeoning "juggernaut" of critical literature the Radical Enlightenment construct has generated. Chisick repeatedly assures readers the case presented in *Democratic Enlightenment* is "unconvincing." Perhaps he is right. But to demonstrate this, he needs to challenge the main arguments on which the construct is based, and this he shows little sign of doing in any of his three critiques.

Turning to Baker, I agree with him that the word "revolution" was used in different ways in the eighteenth century and that, as he puts it, "Voltaire and some of the other moderate *philosophes* thought of their philosophical age as advancing a 'revolution,' understood in the sense of a great intellectual transformation with profound implications for the betterment of humanity." So of course did Diderot, Boulanger, Helvétius, d'Holbach, and the *Histoire philosophique*, and not least Condorcet. My aim in *Democratic Enlightenment* is to explain the intellectual characteristics of this latter revolutionary tendency which took hold in the 1770s and 1780s, and especially in 1789-93, and explain its thesis that society's existing system of values, laws, and institutions was invalid, that the whole ancien régime was organized to the detriment of the majority and should be overthrown and replaced with different laws and institutions. Since Turgot undoubtedly strove for sweeping reforms in the early 1770s, albeit within the moderate orbit, and was halted by the court and conservative vested interests, I shall leave aside much of Baker's discussion of Turgot and Condorcet as barely relevant. The key point is that Turgot was blocked from implementing his reforms despite not challenging aristocratic dominance, monarchical rule, and elite privileges whereas, in 1789-93, Condorcet presided over much wider-ranging schemes—for democracy, universal education, black emancipation, and women's rights—dramatically breaching those boundaries. This firmly locates Turgot in the moderate and Condorcet in the radical camp, even without considering Condorcet's atheism and Turgot's allegiance to "divine providence" and divine governance of the world.

Baker subscribes to one of the weakest aspects of the corpus in asserting that Spinoza, d'Holbach, and Helvétius are not listed by name in the index of Condorcet's last book, the *Esquisse d'un Tableau historique* (1795). This is barely relevant. What matters in this outstanding work is what Baker leaves unmentioned: Condorcet's dramatic reversal, so characteristic of Diderot and d'Holbach, of Montesquieu's relativism, his insisting "l'ouvrage des mauvais lois," the effect of bad laws and legislators, was to corrupt law and government, prejudicing the "happiness" of the people, while the churches prevented the people from grasping true morality. Typically, Condorcet combines these claims with urging the need comprehensively to renew the whole existing framework of laws and institutions together with the entire moral order.[26] His account of humanity's breakthrough to emancipation, freedom, and its "happiness," he attributes in characteristic Radical Enlightenment vein to the progress of "philosophy" and science. Baker is entitled to suppose "les philosophes vraiment éclairés" principally driving humanity's progress in Condorcet's account do not include Spinoza. Conceivably, he could even be right. But that still leaves Condorcet contending "philosophy" paved the way to overthrowing the "absurdities" of the theologians and the entire existing system of institutions with these twin goals presented as tightly linked—the essence of the Radical Enlightenment construct. In his *Adresse aux Bataves*, and again in the *Tableau*, Condorcet summons the Dutch to remember that they, together with the English, took the lead in science and knowledge before other peoples, as well as in the quest for freedom but, unfortunately, stopped half way. The Dutch began the work of "enlightening your enslaved

neighbours etc.” Did Condorcet mentally exclude Spinoza when writing this and other similar passages? Possibly, but this is improbable and in any case hardly matters.[27]

Baker, dismissing my account of the French Revolution as highly implausible, asks: “Did none of the factors that undermined and eventually destroyed the Old Regime shape the character of the Revolution that was the outcome of the Old Regime’s collapse?” I think it perfectly plausible to answer that the main factors that undermined the French ancien regime—chronic financial crisis, major strains resulting from international rivalry, and deep ecclesiastical divisions—had practically no influence on shaping the revolutionary outcome. Nor would this be surprising. Many historians of the English Revolution of 1642-52 and of the Russian Revolution argue that the factors that caused the revolutionary crisis provide little indication as to the revolutionary outcome. Indeed, it strikes me as obvious that none of the main factors that brought about the crisis of 1789 had any appreciable effect in shaping the main enactments and ideological shifts of the Revolution. Nevertheless, numerous factors had marginal effects. *Democratic Enlightenment*, declares Baker, maintains “that the Radical Enlightenment was the *direct* cause, and the only direct cause, shaping the revolutionary *outcome*.” That is not quite accurate. What I maintain is that there were very many direct causes but only one “principal cause,” which is somewhat different.

Most French political pamphlets of 1787-88 undoubtedly reflected the debates of previous years and were not radical in character, although several of the most influential were. Baker’s discussion of the lead-up to 1789, consequently, has scant bearing on the argument of *Democratic Enlightenment*. What he says about Sieyès is doubtless largely right. But since I am not claiming Sieyès was a “Spinozist” and Baker is not denying Sieyès was a materialist, which is all I wanted to point out, his discussion of Sieyès does not affect the main issue. Baker only challenges my interpretation directly when claiming I am especially “inadequate” in recounting the emergence of the Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen. The Declaration, he maintains, “was patched together from competing drafts over a period of weeks, taking form as a series of linguistic compromises reached by contending groups and voted by an assembly of more than one thousand deputies.” I have no quarrel with that and would say exactly the same. The Declaration’s “final form,” Baker contends, believing he has uncovered a serious error on my part, “represented considerable setbacks for the two most notable of Israel’s philosophe-politicians in the National Assembly, Sieyès and Mirabeau.” I shall devote some space to this point as David Bell and Dan Edelstein have likewise insisted on the gravity of my alleged error in attributing the Declaration of Rights of August 1789 to the *parti de philosophie*. But in fact the mistake is theirs, and this “Baker-Bell-Edelstein error,” as I shall term it, needs to be clearly brought out.[28]

First, though, let me dismiss Baker’s absurd aside that I recruit Mirabeau “for the Radical Enlightenment on the grounds that his vast library contained some volumes of Spinoza.” This has nothing to do with it. Mirabeau was a radical because he sought to eliminate privilege and aristocratic dominance, destroy ecclesiastical authority, introduce full unfettered freedom of expression and the press, eliminate the provincial estates and *parlements*, confiscate the Church’s property, subordinate the court to the legislature, make Jews and other minorities equal citizens to Catholics, and secularize, widen, and thoroughly reform education. Also, contrary to what Baker argues, Mirabeau’s and Sieyès’ affirming that the law is the “expression of the general will,” in the Assembly’s debate recorded in the *Archives Parlementaires*, is not a clear invoking of Rousseau since the “general will” was first introduced by Diderot and extensively used in a non-Rousseauist sense also by d’Holbach, Helvétius, Volney, and Sieyès. But the main disagreement here concerns the National Assembly’s so-called Sixth Bureau (Sixième Bureau). In the last stage of the Declaration of the Rights of Man debate, states Baker, opponents blocked Mirabeau’s concept, and the draft taken as the basis for debate towards the end, that proposed by the Sixth Bureau, was “one of the most minimal draft declarations available.”

Yes; but Baker, Bell, and Edelstein fail to inform readers that the Sixth Bureau’s draft was a last-ditch attempt by a substantial conservative bloc, chaired by the bishop of Nancy, to curb freedom of

expression, narrow religious toleration, and prevent elimination of religious authority.[29] Vigorously backed by the monarchist “moderate” leaders Mounier and Lally-Tolendal, indefatigable opponents of the radicalism of Mirabeau and Sieyès, the Sixth Bureau’s intervention to stop Mirabeau, Sieyès, Volney, Pétion, and Brissot (who was not a member of the National Assembly but prominent in the Paris city government and a participant in the Assembly’s deliberations) comprised twenty-four articles centering around four main objectives: 1) introducing “inequality of means” expressly to neutralize “equality of rights”; 2) introducing “natural duties” to further emasculate “natural rights”; 3) urging the need for the state to enforce respect for the “public cult,” the Catholic faith; 4) restricting freedom of expression by allowing such freedom only insofar as it did not “trouble” the publicly established state religion. None of these blocking conservative desiderata were achieved. Admittedly, in finalizing clauses Ten and Eleven of The Declaration, concerning freedom of expression, Mirabeau, Volney, Pétion, and the other radicals combating the Sixth Bureau’s minimalism during the debate’s last furious days were angry that the clergy managed to claw back some ground and force them to compromise.[30] Mirabeau and his allies did not entirely prevail. The Assembly finally stipulated, in Article XI, that the “free communication of ideas and opinions [is] among the most precious rights of man” but qualified this, against Mirabeau’s wishes, stipulating that the individual “accepts responsibility for any abuse of this liberty set by the law.” The final outcome was not, then, a total defeat for the Mounier “moderates” and Sixth Bureau; but the opponents of human rights were largely defeated on all main points. As the revolutionary newspapers announced, it was Mirabeau and Brissot who triumphed. “It was undoubtedly Mirabeau and, outside the Assembly, also Brissot,” observed Jean-Louis Carra (1742-93), a leading revolutionary journalist, who eclipsed everyone else in securing the Declaration: “the nation owes each a fine civic crown.”[31]

The Declaration of the Rights of Man was achieved, slightly dented, by the *philosophique* fringe against heavy “moderate” and conservative opposition, just like abolishing aristocratic titles (June 1790), marriage reform, divorce, Jewish emancipation, freedom of the theatre, and confiscating Church property. No doubt the “Baker-Bell-Edelstein error” will be widely taken up to demonstrate how “unconvincing” I am. But the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen was the founding document of the entire modern tradition of universal human rights, a massively radical initiative causing tremors all across Europe and Latin America, a landmark initiative rendered still more radical in its 1793 version. It would be exceedingly odd if Baker, Bell, and Edelstein were actually right and this enactment *was* the product of the Bishop of Nancy’s and his friends’ minimalist intentions since the Declaration implied the overthrow of royal absolutism, aristocracy, ecclesiastical censorship, and religious authority and was strenuously opposed by the papacy, bishops, and numerous “moderate” enlighteners. Burke characteristically described it as “madness,” “childish futility,” “gross and stupid absurdity,” and “palpable falsity,” not because he deemed it the minimalist, anodyne work of unexceptional minds but because he loathed and feared it.[32]

Baker is a fine scholar whose work I admire who no doubt has reason to represent my book as skewed by overhasty research, “rhetorical bombast, extravagant assertion, blatant omission of issues central to the argument, cavalier dismissal of existing scholarship,” and other gross deficiencies. He wants to show “that Israel gets things wrong, omits evidence that would complicate his claims, or simply forces the meaning of the evidence he does offer”; but he cannot convincingly demonstrate any of this by offering only critical objections that are beside the point, or demonstrably wrong, or that show it is rather he himself who has seriously confused the evidence.

Now for the fiercest assault, delivered by Johnson Kent Wright, another excellent scholar who has published first-class work on Mably and French republicanism. Wright’s antipathy to the tone, style, and argument of *Democratic Enlightenment* leaps up on every page of his review. Like Van Kley, he stipulates, that ‘in any case, as is well known, Israel was not the coiner of the ‘Radical Enlightenment.’” Here at least they are right, though not in the way they suppose. The term Radical Enlightenment [radikale Aufklärung], as explained by the Danish scholar Frederik Stjernfelt,[33] first appeared in German in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and features prominently in Leo Strauss’s

study of Spinoza commenced in 1925. “Radical Enlightenment” for Strauss chiefly denoted atheism and repudiating religious authority. In his introduction to the 1965 English version of his *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* Strauss again highlighted the significance of treating the Bible as “a literary document like any other.”[34] Denying the Bible is a divinely given revelation, held Strauss, is “the true foundation of Biblical science in the modern sense. It is for this reason and only this reason that Spinoza’s work is of fundamental importance.” Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was less an intellectual revolution in itself, though, he pointed out, than part of a broader context—namely, the “critique of Revelation of the radical Enlightenment in the service of which it arose.”[35]

Three features of Strauss’s 1920s “radical Enlightenment” conception are worth noting: first, the idea that rejecting Revelation along with Creation and miracles is the backbone of the *radikale Aufklärung*; second, that this critique is only a stage in the philosophical demolition of religious authority which Strauss traced back originally to Epicurus; and third, that underlying Spinoza’s critique of religion lodges a basic assumption shared with the wider “radical Enlightenment.”[36] This collective intellectual culture Strauss delineates in chapter five of *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* where he argues that, for Spinoza, only science and scholarship provide a universal and objective grounding which religious believers lack and that validates his critique of revealed religion: “only to the extent that Spinoza can construct his system in the spirit of positive science, [...] and subjects himself to scientific [ie. *wissenschaftlich*] scholarly scrutiny in consequence,” does he proceed “with greater right than his opponents who believed in revealed religion.”[37] For Strauss, underlying Spinoza’s philosophy and the *radikale Aufklärung* is the belief their standpoint was more objectively true and subject to scholarly verification than that of their opponents.[38]

Decades later followed Henry May’s crucially important differentiation between “moderate enlightenment” and “revolutionary enlightenment” as the key to any proper understanding of the American Enlightenment, developed in his *The Enlightenment in America* (1976). This opened the way to bracketing rejection of religious authority with comprehensive social and political change—the connection I consider the most decisive component of the “Radical Enlightenment” as a category. May, the first to introduce this conceptualization into English-language historical studies, emphasized the political and social as well as the philosophical character of his “revolutionary Enlightenment.”[39] For May, “revolutionary Enlightenment” was chiefly “belief in the possibility of constructing a new heaven and earth out of the destruction of the old,” beginning with Rousseau and “culminating in Paine and Godwin.” Strauss and May then together with the East German scholar victimized by the Ulbricht regime, Günter Mühlpfordt, were the major forerunners.[40] Margaret Jacob’s *The Radical Enlightenment* (1981), by contrast, had little impact on my thinking. Partly, I was swayed here by the rather devastating reviews of her work, after it first appeared, by Graham Gibbs, Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, and others. But mainly it was her lack of interest in the Dutch debates, insistence on the English background to the Radical Enlightenment, the undue prominence (as it seemed to me) she attributes to Toland, exaggerated stress on social practice and especially Freemasonry, and difficulty of utilizing her approach to connect post-1780 revolutionary developments with the earlier Enlightenment which explains my reservations. To be useful as a broad category, “Radical Enlightenment” *must* clearly link Enlightenment to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century revolutionary and democratic republican upsurge.

Having shown my lack of originality, Wright next reveals “how fragile is the explanatory apparatus that accompanies this grand narrative.” In particular, he targets my argument that frustration after the collapse of moderate reform stimulated the appetite for revolutionary transformation. I maintain that “moderate Enlightenment failed”; Wright construes me as arguing, “because it was not radical; Radical Enlightenment succeeded because it was.” These, he says, are “weightless vagaries” that show that I am “not actually interested in *explaining* the Enlightenment at all, at least in terms of any conventional historical context. Instead, *Democratic Enlightenment* reveals [my] conception of ‘Radical Enlightenment’ for what it is—a classic case of *hypostasization*, if ever there was one.” This astounding objection which

makes no sense whatever, Wright justifies by adding: “Whether he or she actually uses the adjective ‘radical’ or not, no scholar surveying the Enlightenment as a whole has ever done without the idea of a *spectrum* of opinion, typically running from ‘progressive’ to ‘conservative,’ for classifying its thinkers and their ideas [...]. The rule applies to Cassirer, Hazard, Venturi, Gay, Hampson, Darnton, Outram—there are virtually no exceptions.” Indeed; but I have fully explained above and in *Democratic Enlightenment* (pp. 27, 43-4, 46-56), not least when discussing the Lisbon earthquake controversy (pp.39-55), why the spectrum concept is now redundant for understanding what the main quarrels and collisions within the Enlightenment are about. What is needed is a schema clarifying, not obscuring, the basic rift between those reconciling science and religious authority and those embracing reason alone, a rift that further widened dramatically once the Revolution erupted. The spectrum thesis is not just vague and superficial; it overlooks major segments of the Enlightenment. Besides, it is never good strategy to assert (as other contributors to the corpus also do),[41] that a mighty consensus militates against someone’s stance. I reply as Bayle did long ago: scholarly consensus is frequently unreliable, and even *consensus omnium* can easily be wrong.[42]

To be “wrong” is one thing. Wright’s claim that I maintain that the “moderate Enlightenment failed because it was not radical; Radical Enlightenment succeeded because it was”—and that “the real scandal” is the hypostasization of ‘Radical Enlightenment’ itself—is perfect claptrap. Moderate Enlightenment failed because aristocratic and ecclesiastical opposition blocked it, not least in France. Here I agree with Baker: Turgot “failed to reform the Old Regime because it was not reformable; it could only be brought down eventually by its own contradictions.” Radical Enlightenment partially succeeded between 1789 and 1799 *not* “because it was radical” but because royal, aristocratic, and ecclesiastical power collapsed and the Revolution created a situation in which conservatism, moderation, and authoritarian populism all fragmented and weakened each other. Meanwhile, the revolutionary clique around Brissot and Condorcet were in no way pursuing the same objectives as the earlier court reformers of the 1770s. “The writings of Quesnay, Turgot, and the friends of those authors,” as Tom Paine explained the difference, “are of the serious kind; but they labored under the same disadvantage with Montesquieu: their writings abound with moral maxims of government, but are rather directed to economize and reform the administration of the government, than the government itself.”[43] Postulating a profound difference between reforming administration and changing the system, between eliminating supernatural agency and philosophies like Locke’s and Newton’s harmonizing religion with science is not the sleight of hand Wright alleges, and no “fallacy,” but a clear dividing line differentiating usefully between moderate reform and revolution. The contrast stemmed from the irreparable breach between those harmonizing science and religion as distinct sources of truth and adversaries embracing *philosophique* reason as the exclusive source of truth.

Wright’s talk of “hypostasization” is abysmal, and what follows is scarcely better. I start my discussion of the revolutionary era, with a “preliminary amputation,” excluding the American Revolution from the picture, he claims, blasting me for providing “no analysis of the ‘different pattern’” represented by the American Revolution and “no explanation why it should have proved the exception to so ‘familiar’ a rule, nor any discussion of its consequences for the ‘General Revolution’ as a whole.” But *Democratic Enlightenment* does not exclude the American Revolution from the picture or treat it as an exception. The chapter on the American Revolution continually stresses rather “its very close, intimate relationship with the international Enlightenment” (p. 443). The American Revolution was integral to the “Atlantic Revolution,” and, as I state above, the underlying pattern of the American and French revolutions were similar in major respects despite some obvious differences.[44] That the rift between moderate and radical Enlightenment in the American Revolution closely paralleled the split within the French Enlightenment is especially significant. The extremely bitter American ideological conflict culminated in the 1790s with Jefferson heading the democratic side and John Adams the “moderate” side, the latter designing (backed by key preachers) to block democracy and retain as much informal aristocracy as possible.

Wright delivers his coup de grâce by highlighting what he calls “the largest single lacuna in *Democratic Enlightenment*, which alone invalidates any claim it has to treating the Enlightenment ‘both as an intellectual movement and as mainstream socio-economic and political history.’” This, supposedly, is the “almost total occultation of the history of international relations in the eighteenth century—the inter-imperial rivalries between the ‘Atlantic’ powers that surely are essential to grasping the interrelation between the Enlightenment and great political upheavals that followed in its wake.” These rivalries matter and I would never deny their importance for the era. In *Democratic Enlightenment*, I discuss their impact on North America, Latin America, India, and the Dutch East Indies, besides France, Spain, and Britain. The Seven Years War, as Wright says, *was* a huge factor. But it has virtually nothing to do with why one particular revolutionary faction decisively shaped the French Revolution. If the stresses deriving from the international relations drama made a political crisis inevitable, there are many kinds of crisis. Even if one conjectures that it made a revolution inevitable—which I do not—there are many kinds of revolution. The Belgian Revolution of 1789-91 was preceded by comparable international strains but predominantly aimed at restoring the rights of the nobility, clergy, and old magistracies, balancing new and old within a politically new but socially conservative framework of Belgian federal autonomy. [45]

Discussing imperial rivalries and the Seven Years’ War throws *no* light whatever on why the Revolution in France followed a diametrically opposite path from Belgium. Why the French Revolution abolished all the old laws and institutions and introduced human rights, full toleration, freedom of the press, universal secular education, the world’s first democratic constitution (February 1793), gender equality in marriage law, divorce, black emancipation, and elimination of religious authority, not to mention a new calendar, system of weights and measures, and renaming thousands of streets, towns, villages, and public buildings throughout France, cannot in the slightest degree be clarified following Wright’s and Baker’s directive to focus on international relations, the financial crisis, and the failed 1770s court projects. Exactly the same applies to the Batavian Revolution (1795-1806), Rhenish revolution of 1792-93, and Italian revolutions of 1796-1800. Clear, meaningful answers follow only by focusing on the Radical Enlightenment. Far from being a “hypostasization,” identifying radical philosophy as the sole “big” factor shaping the Revolution is an empirically-grounded explanation employing evident categories and, not only that, is the *only* viable and convincing argument available.

All four critiques share features with the earlier series of onslaughts penned by Lilti, La Vopa, Verbeek, Moyn, Jacob, Stuurman, Chisick, Casini, Bell, De Dijn, McMahon, Van Kley, and Edelstein, some of which are more pertinent than others. Among the more thoughtful and balanced is David Bell’s article in the *New Republic* (8 February 2012), “Where do we come from?” But even this evinces several characteristics typical of this curious literature—extensive misrepresentation and complaining I fail to prove things I had no intention of proving. Bell thinks I see Robespierre as an heir to “the moderates” and objects that I do not “provide evidence that anyone called for anything like a revolutionary movement to overthrow existing regimes.” I do *not* view Robespierre as heir to “the moderates” but as a populist authoritarian dictator, and I never sought to prove the existence of an organized revolutionary movement in the sense he means. Rather, the Radical Enlightenment, I argue, forged a rationale as to why a general revolution was needed, specifying the kind of sweeping measures this would entail. Of course, Bell does “not think the argument of *Democratic Enlightenment* is correct” and finds much “to criticize.” But if we discount the misreporting, muddle about the Sixth Bureau shared with Baker and Edelstein, and claims about Rousseau (where we sharply disagree), his grounds for pronouncing *Democratic Enlightenment* “unconvincing” look sparse to the point of vanishing.

Since this “juggernaut” of misleadingly critical literature shows little sign of abating and frequently repeats fundamentally misconstrued objections, perhaps even borrowed one from the other, let me finish by listing some regularly recurring principal antitheses that seem to me utterly devoid of force. Of course, there are also occasional strands of good criticism. McMahon notes the relative lack of discussion of economic issues: “For Israel’s reticence [...] regarding the advent of commercial society—

surely by any reckoning a central feature of modernity and, as Istvan Hont has argued recently, a critical Enlightenment concern—suggests that he has yet to fully clarify the relationship between Enlightenment and enlightenment, between the values promoted by his radical protagonists and their precise relation to history and historical context.”[46] Fair enough, and I am working to correct this gap. Meanwhile, the tiresome litany of misplaced assertions predominates; these are:

- 1) That my “idealist” interpretation argues that ideas are the main driving force of history. In fact, my argument does nothing of the kind but rather, through the “controversialist method,” combines social and intellectual history.
- 2) That, they regularly assure readers, there is no essential connection between eliminating religious authority (and divine sanction) and introducing a new secular moral and legal order based on democratic republicanism and equality. Obviously, there is.
- 3) That the argument is “reductionist” and imposes a “package logic” on the historical process.[47] Wright complains of a principle of “coherence” that is never defined, that I have “selected a series of beliefs [I regard] as logically linked—monist metaphysics, egalitarian ethics, democratic politics—and extrapolated them into a stylized entity dubbed ‘Radical Enlightenment,’ which is then made to stand for the whole, accident having thereby been transformed into essence.” Magnificent rhetoric but void: the category “Radical Enlightenment” is not a “pre-set” package but built up in progressive stages on detailed and clearly specified empirical findings.
- 4) That the large consensus behind the “spectrum,” and against the polarization postulated by my interpretation, represents a powerful argument against it. Plainly, it does not.
- 5) That the Radical Enlightenment construct was introduced in 1981 by Margaret Jacob, an error both in terms of who coined the term and how the category evolved.
- 6) That I claim Spinoza inspired the Radical Enlightenment, which is then supposedly rebutted by proving that x or y—Baker cites Condorcet—never mentions Spinoza.
- 7) That I make no attempt to demonstrate that Spinozism diffused widely in European society, as distinct from among intellectual networks. Why on earth should it have?
- 8) That the term “Spinozist” was used in the eighteenth-century as an expression of general opprobrium and remained extremely vague, a charge labored *ad nauseam* by Lilti. Actually, this term was mostly *specifically* used to refer to concepts eliminating supernatural agency and substituting a purely secular morality, social policy and politics.

Curiously, much of my alleged “exaggeration” of Spinoza’s role can be seen from this to be actually the handiwork of the critics themselves. Many clearly have a Spinoza problem. Armenteros states that Part IV of *Democratic Enlightenment*, on the “Spinoza Controversies of the Later Enlightenment,” “contains the core of the book’s argument.” Why does she think that? Because it discusses Spinoza more than the rest? It is much the shortest and least important of the five sections. Baker repeatedly intrudes “Spinoza” in the most absurd fashion because he imagines this helps him ridicule the main argument. “Israel tortures the evidence,” alleges Van Kley, “to find ties linking Paine to Spinoza.”[48] But I was not the scholar who demonstrated the link between Paine’s *Age of Reason* and Spinoza, which, in any case, is a *very* minor feature of my portrayal of Paine as a democratic Enlightenment publicist.[49]

My “radical ‘package’”, holds Armenteros, “remains unchanged throughout the centuries: no one seems to alter Spinoza’s materialist, monist, and republican scheme, or to mix it with other intellectual traditions in different contexts [...] Spinoza emerges as the radical tradition’s sole creator and his

descendants as the replicators and perpetrators of the broadest tendencies in his thought.” But as already stated, Spinoza was not the radical tradition’s “creator” or even the first to devise the basic paradigm linking republicanism, elimination of religious authority, and full freedom of expression; this was Franciscus van den Enden (1602-74), as far as we know.[50] Spinoza was simply the first to elaborate the paradigm within a philosophically cogent framework rendering it hard to assail intellectually, an achievement giving him a certain lasting centrality in all that followed. Unlike Hobbes, Locke, or Bayle, but like Hume, Spinoza remained at the epicenter of European philosophical debate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century—a purely empirical fact impossible to contest. Armenteros points to the “major weakness that the book derives from its breadth—its insufficient interest in tracking the origins, transformation, and destiny of ideas among intellectual traditions and between individual thinkers. The result is that the reader is left with the impression that evidence is lacking that Spinoza’s ideas were as pervasive and influential as is claimed.” My answer is that *Democratic Enlightenment* has absolutely no need to demonstrate in even more detail than it does already that key figures such as d’Argens, Voltaire, Diderot, Lessing, Herder, Mendelssohn, and Goethe were deeply preoccupied with Spinoza.

More to the point, I maintain that, besides Spinoza, Van den Enden, Bayle, Diderot, d’Holbach, Helvétius, Lessing, Herder, and Condorcet also made major contributions and additions to the content of the Radical Enlightenment. Numerous important supplements were added in the eighteenth century that had major significance for politics, toleration, and social policy as well as pure philosophy. Compulsory universal education, women’s rights in politics, universal racial equality, emancipation of the blacks, anti-colonialism, mixing elements of direct with representative democracy, and reforming marriage law to turn marriage into a purely civil contract combined with civil divorce are all aspects of social thought not foreshadowed in any specific way by Spinoza. Philosophically, Spinoza’s monism was reworked in various respects, especially with regard to sense, sensibility, and physiology. I would not go as far as John Zammito in postulating a major shift from Spinoza’s “geometric monism” to Diderot’s “vitalist monism,” but I agree that the mid-eighteenth-century use of the term “new Spinozists” reflects a not insignificant shift in the terminology and discourse of philosophical materialism.[51]

The loud protests concerning Spinoza, then, seem scarcely better grounded than the rest of these lines of attack. Insofar as these eight now routinized bogus criticisms, “paper tigers,” and stalking horses obscure real issues and strands of discussion that are important and need discussing, they are also reprehensible. Science and scholarship progress by employing meaningful categories which should be examined for their usefulness. Fundamental divisions characterized not just the internal history of the Enlightenment throughout but also the entire European and Latin American revolutionary world of 1789 to 1848. The “Radical Enlightenment” category explains key developments in the interaction of ideas with social and political reality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and has much to offer in nineteenth and twentieth century contexts. It is now an indispensable category for all the humanities, literary studies, art, and philosophy as well as history. The burgeoning “juggernaut” aimed against the Radical Enlightenment construct is undoubtedly massive and formidable. But apart from tiresomely complaining that the core argument is “unconvincing” without ever demonstrating anything of the sort, all it achieves is to reveal itself at every point to be shot through with error, failure to grasp, irrelevance, and persistent misrepresentation.

Notes

[1] For a summary of the work available in 1993, see Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever, eds., *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700. Papers presented at the International Colloquium, held at Rotterdam 5-8 October 1994* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Wielema later published a valuable overview, see Michiel Wielema, *The March of the Libertines. Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660-1750)* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004).

[2] An excellent introductory summary is Gianni Paganini, *Les philosophies clandestines à l'âge classique* (Paris: PUF, 2005).

[3] See Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Champion, 1999); for a list of Mori's and McKenna's publications on Bayle in the early 1990s, see Mori's appendices; for a more recent summary, see Antony McKenna, "Pierre Bayle in the Twentieth Century," in Wiep van Bunge and H. Bots, eds., *Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), le philosophe de Rotterdam: Philosophy, Religion and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 253-67.

[4] Pagden unacceptably omits Van den Enden, Koerbagh, and Meyer, ignores the clandestine manuscript literature, and barely discusses Bayle; see Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and why it still matters* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp.46-101.

[5] Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 840-62 and *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 56-92.

[6] Quoted in Pierre Naville, *Paul Thiry d'Holbach et la philosophie scientifique au XVIIIe siècle*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), pp. 111-12; and Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, p. 650.

[7] On Bergier, see Jeffrey Burson, "Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1718-1790): An Enlightened Anti-Philosophe," in J.D. Burson and U. Lehner, eds., *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe. A Transnational History* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 65-90; for Lamourette, see C. Chopelin-Blanc, "Adrien Lamourette (1742-1794). The Unconventional Revolutionary and Reformer," in *ibid.*, pp. 109-25.

[8] For his now discarded classification, see D.M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment* (New York: OUP, 2001).

[9] See Mark Curran, *Atheism, Religion and Enlightenment in pre-revolutionary Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), p. 164; and David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment. Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp.263-309; and also Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, chapter six, especially pp. 144-8.

[10] See Robert Coram, *Political Inquiries; to which is added, a plan for the general Establishment of Schools throughout the United States* (Wilmington, Del.: 1791).

[11] Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Correspondance universelle sur ce qui intéresse le bonheur de l'homme et de la société* ('Londres' [Neuchâtel], 1783), no. 5, p. 295.

[12] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, F.M.Turner, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p.76.

[13] Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas. An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 24-9, 95-120, 695-708.

[14] See Dale Van Kley's review of *Democratic Enlightenment* in the *American Historical Review* 118 (2013): 572-3.

[15] Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 910, 913, 922-3, 934n; and Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, pp. 60-1, 135-7, 222, 284, 488.

[16] Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp.761-78.

[17] Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 685-7, 833-6; and Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 330-2, 423-4, 770-1, 776-8.

[18] See Harvey Chisick, "Interpreting the Enlightenment," *The European Legacy*, XIII (2008): 35-57; and Harvey Chisick, "Looking for Enlightenment," *History of European Ideas* 34 (2008): 570-82.

[19] Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 17-24.

[20] Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*. pp. 794-813.

[21] See also Chisick, "Looking for Enlightenment," p. 576.

[22] Joseph-Antoine Cérutti, et al., eds., *La Feuille villageoise* (Paris: 1790-94) vol.1, no. 7 (11 Nov. 1790), pp. 115-16, 122-3, and vol.1, no.10 (2 Dec.1790), pp. 1-5.

[23] Chisick, "Looking for Enlightenment," pp. 576-7.

[24] For Lilti's critique, see Antoine Lilti, "Comment écrit-on l'histoire intellectuelle des Lumières? Spinozisme, radicalisme et philosophie," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 64 (2009): 171-206; for my reply (which *Annales* declined to publish), Jonathan Israel, "L'histoire intellectuelle des Lumières et de la Révolution : une incursion critique," *La Lettre Clandestine* 19 (2011): 173-225.

[25] Robert Darnton, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France 1769-1789* (New York: Norton, 1995), pp. 194, 199, 206, and 227; and Curran, *Atheism, Religion*, p. 5.

[26] Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain, Projets, Esquisse, Fragments et Notes* (1772-1794), Jean-Pierre Schandeler and Pierre Crépel, eds. (Paris: Institut national d'études démographiques, 2004), pp. 355-86.

[27] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, p. 322.

[28] See section II of David Bell's article in the *New Republic* (8 February 2012) "Where do we come from?"; and Dan Edelstein, "A Response to Jonathan Israel," in Kate Tunstall, ed., *Self-Evident Truths? Human Rights and the Enlightenment. The Oxford Amnesty Lectures* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 127-35.

[29] See also Keith Michael Baker, "The Idea of a Declaration of Rights," in Dale Van Kley, ed., *The French Idea of Freedom. The Old Regime and the Declaration of Rights of 1789* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp.188-9.

[30] Stéphane Rials, *La déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Paris: Hachette, 1988), pp. 220-4, 236-9, and 246-8.

[31] Jean-Louis Carra, *L'Orateur des États-Généraux pour 1789*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1789), ii, pp. 32-3; Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 907-8; and Israel *Revolutionary Ideas*, pp. 82-4.

[32] See F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 2: 313-14.

[33] Frederik Stjernfelt, "The Emergence of the 'Radical Enlightenment' in Humanist Scholarship," delivered at the Brussels conference, in May 2013.

[34] Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* [English translation (1965), original edition *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft. Untersuchungen zu Spinozas Theologisch-*

Politischen Traktat [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1930], new ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p.35; see also Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza's Book of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 191.

[35] "Der Zusammenhang, in den sie gehört ist die Offenbarungs-Kritik der radikalen Aufklärung, in deren Dienst sie entsteht." See Leo Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft*, new ed., with foreword by Norbert Altwicker (Darmstadt: Georg Olms, 1981), p. 2.

[36] Strauss, "Preface" (1962) to Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* [1930] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 15, 17.

[37] Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p.140.

[38] Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique*, p. 143.

[39] Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 153-6.

[40] Ibid.; see also Donald H. Meyer, *The Democratic Enlightenment* (New York: Putnam, 1976), pp. xxiv-xxv.

[41] See Annelien De Dijn, "The Politics of Enlightenment from Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel," *The Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 785-805, here p. 799.

[42] Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 71-7.

[43] Tom Paine, *Rights of Man*, new ed. introduced by Eric Foner, notes by H.Collins (New York-London: Penguin, 1985) p. 94.

[44] Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, pp. 443-81.

[45] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, p. 324.

[46] Darrin M. McMahon, "What are Enlightenment?" *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (2007): pp. 601-16, here p. 613.

[47] Anthony J. La Vopa, "A new intellectual history? Jonathan Israel's Enlightenment," *The Historical Journal* 52 (2009): 717-38.

[48] See note 14 above.

[49] See Caroline Robbins, "The Lifelong Education of Thomas Paine (1737-1809)," in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 127 (1983): 135-42, here pp. 140-1.

[50] See Wim Klever's chapter „Van den Enden en zijn vernieuwing van de politicologie," in Wim Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza. Presentatie van een emanciperende generatie 1750-1700* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1997), pp. 31-52.

[51] See J.H.Zammito, "Médecin-Philosoph: Persona for Radical Enlightenment," *Intellectual History Review* 18 (2008): 427-40, here p. 432.

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