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Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004. ix + 397 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. Cloth, \$45.00. ISBN 0300100329. Paper, \$25.00. ISBN: 0300113463.

Review by Ronald Schechter, The College of William and Mary.

Almost exactly two centuries ago, Hegel wrote an account of the Enlightenment that still affects how historians and other commentators view that crucial period in European history. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), he argued that the Enlightenment was not simply age of reason, as both its supporters and detractors had typically maintained, but rather a conflicted movement in which reason and faith confronted each other with equal strength. Most writers on the Enlightenment know Hegel's interpretation through the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Horkheimer and Adorno argue that mythical thinking did not end with the Enlightenment, but rather confronted the competing force of reason and ultimately took it over. Far from liberating humanity, the Enlightenment forced human beings to undergo a brutal process of "rationalization," i.e., conformity. The principle of equivalence itself had become a "fetish," and the result was both the fascism from which Horkheimer and Adorno fled and the cultural wasteland (southern California) in which they took uneasy refuge. Although largely obscure prior to 1968, in the past generation *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has gained such a following—becoming in the process one of the founding texts of postmodernism—that it is now hard to imagine a different way of applying Hegelian dialectic to the study of the Enlightenment. Yet this is precisely the goal of Louis Dupré in his latest book, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*.

Like Horkheimer and Adorno, Dupré takes from Hegel the idea that the Enlightenment had an anti-rationalistic tendency. Unlike the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, however, Dupré thinks this was a good thing. "Enlightenment for [Hegel] consists neither in the critical rationalism of pure insight nor in the conservative one of faith, but in a constant struggle between the two," Dupré writes, adding that this struggle was "productive." Precisely what the author means by "productive" is not clear, but the main point is that we do not understand the Enlightenment if we restrict ourselves to the rationalists. We should not "exclude traditionalist thinkers such as Vico, Malebranche, Burke, and Herder from the Enlightenment as if they belonged to what Isaiah Berlin has called the Counter-Enlightenment" (p. 4). His list does not stop there. Along with canonical *philosophes* such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Hume, and Kant, Dupré analyzes the work of Baumgarten and Bolingbroke, Fénelon and Fielding, Gibbon and Grimm, Leibniz and Lessing, Shaftsbury and Swedenborg. Pick your favorite late seventeenth or eighteenth-century thinker, check the index, and chances are Dupré has something to say about him (or her, in the singular case of Madame Guyon who, according to Dupré, gave Archbishop Fénelon the courage to criticize Louis XIV's overweening absolutism). His purview extends from Dublin in the west to Königsberg in the east and from Skara in the north to Naples in the south. It includes atheists, pantheists, and deists; Pietists and Quietists; Jansenists and Jesuits; Puritans and Anglicans; materialists and spiritualists.

In the spirit of Hegelian dialectic, Dupré has something positive and negative to say about everyone, though he clearly favors the believers. He disapproves of Rousseau's totalitarian streak but admires his "delicate religious sensitivity" (p. 255). His least favorite *philosophe* is Baron d'Holbach, the atheist whose view of nature betrays a "naïve reductionism and a simplistic determinism," (p. 32) but he pays grudging

respect when he writes of the baron's most famous book, "Despite its flat-footed, question-begging materialism, *The System of Nature* remains a disturbing book for believers" (p. 266).

That Dupré counts himself among the believers helps to explain the presence of an otherwise unlikely hero of the book. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi is familiar to students of the German Enlightenment for outing his late friend Lessing as a secret adherent to pantheism, i.e. the belief that God and nature are the same thing, prompting a *Pantheismusstreit* (pantheism quarrel) in which a generation of authors argued over whether Lessing had actually been an adherent to that theology. Also known as Spinozism after its seventeenth-century originator Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza, pantheism was a serious heresy, tantamount for most contemporaries to atheism. With Lessing safely dead (and presumably in hell) and therefore unable to answer the charges, Jacobi published a book containing a conversation he claimed they had had, shortly before his friend's death, in which Lessing allegedly declared his belief in Spinoza's doctrine. Jacobi's avowed purpose was to show the slippery slope from deism—the belief that God's existence can be known through reason alone, independent of divine revelation—to pantheism, and from there to atheism. Dupré writes, "Spinozism was plain and simple pantheism and that, Jacobi argued, amounted to *atheism*." (p. 306, emphasis in the original)

Two things are remarkable about all this. First, that Dupré actually buys Jacobi's story. (He writes without irony of *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*, "They contained a revealing report on Lessing's secret thought," as if Jacobi's word alone were sufficient evidence.) Second, that he is not troubled by Jacobi's supposed betrayal of his dead friend. Even if Lessing had become a pantheist at the end of his life—certainly a reversal of the better-known pattern of conversion to orthodoxy—he clearly would have wanted Jacobi to keep the change of heart confidential. Both responses on Dupré's part are only explicable in terms of faith. Dupré wants to believe Jacobi's tale and accordingly makes a leap of faith, and he wants Jacobi's tell-all book to have been justified because he is among those "believers" who find atheism "disturbing."

The heavy presence of faith in Dupré's book raises the question of the intended audience. The title, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, suggests a contribution to the historiography of ideas. But already in the first pages there are signs that historians, among others, may not be welcome. "This book is not intended to be an intellectual history of the Enlightenment," the author writes. "Rather have I attempted to draw an intellectual portrait of a crucial epoch in European history with particular emphasis on the development and interaction of those ideas that most contributed to the formation of *our own spiritual identity*." (p. xiv, emphasis added)

More disturbing still are Dupré's remarks in the preface. Again using the first person plural, he writes, "[T]he need to question has advantageously distinguished our culture from others." He adds, "Islamic culture ... was never forced to question its traditional worldview." (p. ix) Perhaps I'm splitting hairs, but is there a difference between saying your culture has been "advantageously distinguished" and that it is superior? As to the reduction of "Islamic culture" to a singular and unquestioned "traditional worldview," one hardly knows where to begin to refute this Orientalist cliché. It will suffice to recall a few of the Muslim philosophers of the Middle Ages. Avicenna (980-1037), the great Iranian physician and philosopher, left his mark on Christendom via his commentaries on Aristotle, but he was also engaged in a heated debate within the Islamic world. He and his followers, collectively known simply as "philosophers," argued that in cases where logical or scientific investigation called any particular claim of the Qur'an into doubt, the statement in question should be interpreted as a metaphor for a divine truth that the human intellect could not apprehend directly. The theologian al-Ghazali (1058-1111) responded with a book called *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, which in turn prompted Averroës (1126-98)—also famous in the west for his contribution to Aristotelian philosophy—to write a defense of the philosophers, *The Incoherence of Incoherence*. [1]

According to Dupré's Hegelian definition of the Enlightenment, all three of these thinkers and their followers participated in a Muslim Enlightenment, which predated the European version by half a millennium. Indeed, the "philosophers" of the medieval Islamic world look very much like the *philosophes* of the European Enlightenment, and their argument with al-Ghazali looks strikingly like the *Pantheismusstreit* in late eighteenth-century Germany. In both cases the main point of contention was the authority of "reason" versus that of "revelation." Today as well, it should go without saying, Muslim theologians around the world address the same dilemma, as do theologians of countless other religions. In this matter the West has no "advantage" over other cultures.

Ultimately, Dupré's book is more of a symptom than an explanation of the Enlightenment and "modern culture," and it is most valuable for the urgent question it inadvertently provokes: what are the historical implications of the prevalent belief in the West that "we" are uniquely endowed with the capacity for spiritual soul-searching, self-criticism, and "questioning"?

NOTES

[1] Tamara Sonn, *A Brief History of Islam* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), p. 50.

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