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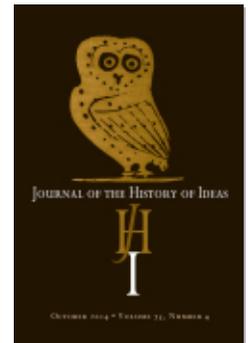
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Review-Essay: Religion and Enlightenment

Simon Grote

David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Jeffrey D. Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment: Jean-Martin de Prades and Ideological Polarization in Eighteenth-Century France* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

Ulrich Lehner, *Enlightened Monks: The German Benedictines 1740–1803* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Thomas Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment: Faith and the Reform of Learning in the Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006).

In the decade since 2003, when a special issue of the *American Historical Review* heralded the return of religion to Enlightenment studies,¹ the steady stream of books and articles restoring religion to the Enlightenment—

¹ Esp. Jonathan Sheehan, “Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay,” *American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 1061–80.

alongside a parallel stream of review articles, conferences, and conference panels—has continued unabated.²

A definitive history of this historiography's recent rise to prominence has yet to be written, but from the lofty perspective suggested by the general enterprise's very terms—"restoring religion to the Enlightenment"—the multiplicity of its many authors' individual arguments and purposes resolves into some basic shapes and trends that suggest a now familiar story. The Enlightenment, this story goes, has long been regarded as a moment in which the Western world took significant steps toward modernity, steps that involved the diminution of something commonly identified as religion. These steps include the rise of theoretical defenses of religious toleration and separation of church and state as a means of limiting the state's power to enforce religious observance, the rise of atheism and the diminishment of respect for revealed religion under the onslaught of biblical criticism and philosophical skepticism, and the emergence of powerful critiques of the spiritual and political prerogatives of the clergy, to take but a few examples. This type of modernization narrative is old but resilient. One of its best-known exponents, Peter Gay, retains his canonical aura and remains a point of departure for critics and admirers alike,³ and newer exponents of similar narratives abound. The Enlightenment has been described in recent years as witness to the liberation of humanity from divine-command theories of moral obligation⁴; the demise of the

² E.g. Ritchie Robertson, "Religion and Enlightenment: A Review Essay," *German History* 25 (2007): 422–31; Jeremy Gregory, "Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': Or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2009): 287–305; *Aufklärung* 21 (2009), "Themenschwerpunkt: Religion," ed. Robert Theis; Michael Hofmann and Carsten Zelle, eds., *Aufklärung und Religion: Neue Perspektiven* (Erlangen: Wehrhahn, 2010); Charly Coleman, "Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 82 (2010): 368–95; "New Approaches to Religious and Radical Enlightenment," panel organized by Jeffrey Burson, 13th International Congress for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Graz, Austria, July 28, 2011; "God and the Enlightenment," conference at the George Washington Forum at Ohio University, October 4–6, 2012.

³ As measured by, for example, his inclusion in Ryan Patrick Hanley and Darrin M. McMahon, eds., *The Enlightenment*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2010). Cf. Dan Edelstein's admiring treatment in *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 4–5; and, as an example of a recent textbook that takes many cues from Gay, Ronald S. Love, *The Enlightenment* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008).

⁴ J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Christian church's cultural authority and of theology's long-lived dominion over the other sciences⁵; and the emergence of modernity within an intellectual underground inhabited by atheists, radicals, freethinkers, Spinozists, and other opponents of the established churches.⁶

Over the past several decades, explicit or implicit attempts to push back against narratives like these have taken a variety of approaches. One has been to point out the various ways in which religion remained important through the eighteenth century and beyond.⁷ It continued to function as a principle of social cohesion and political legitimation with a major role to play in politics, culture, and people's everyday lives,⁸ and the Bible in particular retained its authority even as withering denials that it contained the word of God prompted German Protestant theologians to refashion it into a pillar of Western culture.⁹

Another approach has been to stipulate the term *enlightened religion* or *religious Enlightenment*, largely in conformity with older histories of eighteenth-century Christian theology, to refer to theologians and theologies characterized by, among other things, respect for natural science; antipathy toward creeds; alertness to the dangers of fanaticism and superstition; promotion of religious toleration; and confidence that revealed truths, to

⁵ Louis Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), esp. 2. Cf. Mark Somos, *Secularisation and the Leiden Circle* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), which sets the gradual "removal of Christian theology from all aspects of thought" (4) primarily in an earlier and different intellectual context.

⁶ E.g. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), and "The Enlightenment Critique of Christianity," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 7, *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660–1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 265–82; Martin Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund: Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland, 1680–1720* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002); and Jonathan Israel (see below, n. 27). On the similar conjecture of Christianity's demise at the hands of esotericism—though with the caveat that defining esotericism in opposition to rationality produces affinities with antimodern secularization theories—see Monica Neugebauer-Wölk, "Einleitung," *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, ed. Neugebauer-Wölk and Holger Zaunstöck (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999), esp. 6–7.

⁷ Dieter Breuer, "Einleitung," *Religion und Religiosität im Zeitalter des Barock*, ed. Breuer (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1995), xvii–xviii; Knud Haakonssen, "Enlightened Dissent: An Introduction," in *Religion and Enlightenment: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2–3.

⁸ E.g. J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Régime*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹ Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

the extent that they are not superfluous, do not contradict truths discoverable by human reason examining the natural world.¹⁰ This approach resonates with the religious connotations of *Aufklärung*'s eighteenth-century usage.¹¹

Still another approach has been to demonstrate that something essential to the Enlightenment, something categorizable as secular and modern, in fact had roots in something religious. Max Weber's well-known thesis about the origins of a capitalist mentality in Calvinist asceticism, one of many "secularization theses" famously criticized by Hans Blumenberg for the tendentiousness of their antimodern rhetoric, is a paradigmatic example.¹² More recent searches for the religious roots of modernity, usually less obviously antimodern in their rhetoric and less emphatic about the persistence of the religious within the modern, have produced a plethora of other candidates. French Jansenism is one favorite. Its ecclesiology and political theory have been identified as sources for arguments within the 1789 French National Assembly in favor of secularizing church property¹³; its account of God as distant and inscrutable has been invoked to explain the emergence of the concept of an autonomous secular realm and, by extension, the rise of French nationalism¹⁴; and its Augustinian view of human

¹⁰ E.g. David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought: Orphans of Knowledge* (Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2000); and, drawing partly on Sorkin, Helena Rosenblatt, "The Christian Enlightenment," in Brown and Tackett, eds., *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution*, 283–301. Cf. Albrecht Beutel, *Aufklärung in Deutschland*, vol. 4 of *Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte*, ed. B. Moeller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Emanuel Hirsch, *Die deutsche christliche Aufklärung im Zeitalter Semlers und Lessings* (Gutersloh: Bertelsman, 1949); Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, 11th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1956), §§104–11; and, still fundamental, Karl Auer, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1929).

¹¹ E.g. Karl Leonhard Reinhold's 1784 account of *Aufklärung* as the education of the masses, including in religious matters, by philosophers: "Thoughts on Enlightenment," trans. Kevin Paul Geiman, in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 65–77.

¹² Hans Blumenberg, "'Säkularisation': Kritik einer Kategorie historischer Illegitimität," in *Die Philosophie und die Frage nach dem Fortschritt*, ed. Helmut Kuhn and Franz Wiedman (Munich: Anton Pustet, 1964), 240–65; and on Blumenberg and Weber, Daniel Weidner, "The Rhetoric of Secularization," *New German Critique* (forthcoming). My thanks to Daniel Weidner and David Martin for these references.

¹³ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 354–58 et passim. On this paradigmatic use of the term secularization, cf. Blumenberg, "'Säkularisation,'" 240–41.

¹⁴ David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), esp. chap. 1; and, on Jansenism's "resacralizing" as well as secularizing effects, Charly Coleman, "Resacralizing the World."

nature as ineradicably selfish has been identified as a quasi-Epicurean presupposition underlying much of Enlightenment political-economic theory.¹⁵ Other searches have led to a variety of anti-Augustinianisms. These include Arminians and Socinians, whose rejection of a repressive orthodox Calvinism in most of Western Europe paved the way for the “intellectual progress” of the eighteenth century¹⁶; Latitudinarians and other Anglicans, whose “moral religion” begat the areligious ethical debates characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment¹⁷; and, most recently, the “federal theology” of Reformed theologian Johannes Coccejus (1603–69), which introduced late seventeenth-century Calvinism and Lutheranism to the possibility of human beings’ progressive moral improvement, thereby undermining long-standing notions of original sin.¹⁸

Any new contribution to this discussion faces a problem that has long threatened the discussion’s very coherence: the basic problem of how to define the central terms *Enlightenment* and *religion*, about which there is understandably no general consensus. The much-discussed difficulty of defining Enlightenment begins, of course, with the fact that the word can denote either a period of time or something in or about that period of time. The benefit of the former usage—to academic publishers, for example—is obvious: it can add an instant luster of modernity and relevance to anything

¹⁵ John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), e.g. 127–30. Cf. Istvan Hont, *The Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 47–51; and Dale van Kley, “Pierre Nicole, Jansenism, and the Morality of Enlightened Self-Interest,” in *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 69–85.

¹⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,” in *The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, by Trevor-Roper (New York: Harper, 1968), 193–236, a right-leaning pendant to Christopher Hill’s portrayal of mid-seventeenth-century Puritans as authors of an “intellectual revolution” in *Intellectual Origins of the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965). On still earlier examples of a similar view, i.e. Adolf von Harnack and earlier Hegelian histories of theology, see Martin Mulsow and Jan Rohls, preface to *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Mulsow and Rohls (Leiden: Brill, 2005), vii–viii.

¹⁷ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991–2000).

¹⁸ Anselm Schubert, *Das Ende der Sünde: Anthropologie und Erbsünde zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); and, leaning on Schubert to explain the origins of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, Stefan Borchers, *Die Erzeugung des “ganzen Menschen”: Zur Entstehung von Anthropologie und Ästhetik an der Universität Halle im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).

and everything in the eighteenth century and some part of the later seventeenth. But only the latter usage can justify this epoch's chronological boundaries and provide a touchstone for telling true luster from false. Here the difficulty increases. If Enlightenment denotes something in or about an epoch, then it must be either something intuitively identifiable or something that can be defined. Each path is full of pitfalls. On the one hand, those who identify Enlightenment intuitively, without defining it, can easily end up talking at cross-purposes.¹⁹ On the other hand, our intuitions about the Enlightenment have been so deeply ingrained by the weight of a vast and variegated scholarship, casual usage, and partiality to mutually inconsistent visions of modernity that it has become extremely difficult, if not impossible, to stipulate any useably specific definition of Enlightenment that does not exclude something already commonly assumed to belong to it. *Enlightenment in National Context*, one of the most influential collections of essays on the Enlightenment in the past three decades, illustrates this problem. It represented a repudiation of the long-standing tendency to take France as the model of Enlightenment per se, and accordingly to define Enlightenment as anticlericalism, atheism, opposition to monarchy, and many other things that did not dominate the intellectual landscape in places such as Germany and Scotland, where—as had become intuitively obvious—there was also an Enlightenment.²⁰ The book's impact testifies to the power of such intuitive obviousness, whatever its sources,²¹ to destabilize even deeply entrenched definitions.

To this problem of settling on a single, usable definition of Enlightenment, a variety of solutions has been proposed, all of which face problems of their own. One common solution is to define Enlightenment as an aggregate of general qualities—mostly descriptors of certain highly educated

¹⁹ A classic example of this danger can be found in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), where in separate essays, Christian Wolff's influence is portrayed unhesitatingly as both a sign of the Enlightenment's impact in the Holy Roman Empire (T. C. W. Blanning) and an impediment to its impact in Sweden (Tore Frangsmyr).

²⁰ Porter and Teich, eds., *Enlightenment in National Context*, vii. Cf. Zelle, "Einleitung," in Hofmann and Zelle, eds., *Aufklärung und Religion*, 7.

²¹ Conjectures about possible sources of this obviousness—in nationalism and geopolitics, and in the desire to restore religion to the Enlightenment, respectively—can be found in Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20–21; and Sheehan, "Enlightenment," 1066–67. Another source, i.e. antipathy to 1980s postmodernist and other caricatures of the Enlightenment, can perhaps be inferred from David Hollinger, "The Enlightenment and the Genealogy of Cultural Conflict in the United States," in *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 7–18. But see also the more elaborate genealogy in Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 21–28.

people's ideals, worldviews, preoccupations, and reform programs—that transcend national particularities: rationality, toleration, humanitarianism, utilitarianism, and so on.²² Among the obstacles to accepting this kind of solution is the difficulty of finding such qualities as a complete aggregate in most places where Enlightenment is assumed to have been, and the fact that many individual qualities present definitional puzzles of their own, especially if their definitions are supposed to warrant drawing the Enlightenment's chronological boundaries around the eighteenth century.²³

Another solution has been to define Enlightenment in terms of practical modes of communication: the emergence of salons, newspapers, coffee-houses, masonic lodges, the public sphere, the literary public, and a general culture of sociability; the expansion and creation of networks of scholarly communication; the emergence of eclectically assembled and non-hierarchically structured texts; and the development of non-dogmatic argumentative structures in learned debate, for example.²⁴ Those who are uncomfortable with a definition of Enlightenment that excludes ideas may insist that new modes of communication be attached to a more extensive aggregate definition, but there remains the obstacle that many intuitively Enlightenment ideas (such as those that appeared primarily in systematically arranged university textbooks) continued to be communicated by old means.²⁵

A third type of solution has been to define Enlightenment as the consequence of a single cause, of which recent proposals include the emergence of an internationally influential modernization narrative out of the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns in late seventeenth-century France,²⁶ a post-1680 “convergence between Augustinian and Epicurean currents of

²² E.g. Mikuláš Teich, “Afterword,” in Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *Enlightenment in National Context*, 216.

²³ One attempt to overcome these obstacles—namely by defining Enlightenment not as an aggregate of ideals but as a newly vigorous engagement with the single, extremely general question of “the relationship between spirit [*Geist*] and sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*]”—can be found in Panajotis Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), esp. 19–21.

²⁴ E.g. Sheehan, “Enlightenment,” 1075–79; Carla Hesse, “Towards a New Topography of Enlightenment,” *European Review of History* 13 (2006): 499–508; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 16–21; James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Martin Gierl, *Pietismus und Aufklärung: Theologische Polemik und der Kommunikationswandel der Gelehrsamkeit am Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), among many others.

²⁵ Cf. Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment*, 5; Hesse, “Towards a New Topography,” 506–7; and Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, 10–11.

²⁶ Edelstein, *Enlightenment*.

thinking about the nature of man and the possibility of society” that produced in the 1740s a “new focus on betterment in this world,”²⁷ and the international dissemination of the ideas of Benedict Spinoza.²⁸ The usefulness of these proposals depends in large part on whether a sufficiently broad and intuitively Enlightenment-resembling set of consequences can be traced convincingly to the proposed cause. In the case of the last proposal, advanced with stunning comprehensiveness by Jonathan Israel, the jury is still out. Israel conceptually divides Enlightenment thinkers into two categories, *radical* and *moderate*, each of which articulated its ideas in response to the dissemination of a systematically coherent set of philosophical positions articulated by Spinoza: a monistic metaphysics that ruled out teleology, miracles, providence, revelation, and the immortality of the soul; a denial that moral principles have divine origins; a rejection of ecclesiastical authority; a denial that social hierarchy, noble privilege, and monarchical power are ordained by God; and robust support for freedom of thought and for political egalitarianism.²⁹ The radical Enlighteners, modernity’s standard-bearers, defended a democratic and revolutionary ideology—a “package of basic human rights”—that derived from Spinoza’s ideas and that ultimately bore responsibility for the French Revolution’s outbreak and inspired its loftiest ideals.³⁰ By contrast, the moderate Enlighteners, also reformers in their own ways, responded to what they perceived as the danger of Spinozistic radicalism by attempting—and ultimately failing, because of the comparative incoherence of their more conservative ideology—to “restore stable and enduring structures of authority, legitimacy, knowledge, and faith.”³¹ Critics of this already enormously influential bipartite classification have questioned, broadly speaking, both its comprehensiveness (i.e. whether every Enlightenment thinker can really be classified as a full-fledged radical or a moderate) and the genealogical claim embedded within it (i.e. whether all instances of radicalism and moderatism are truly traceable to an encounter with a systematic philosophy that can be regarded as Spinoza’s own).³²

²⁷ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 8–9.

²⁸ Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁹ Israel, e.g. *Radical Enlightenment*, 4, 11–13, 159–62; *Democratic Enlightenment*, 11.

³⁰ Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 12.

³¹ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 9.

³² E.g. Margaret C. Jacob, “Spinoza Got It,” *London Review of Books*, November 8,

Finally, there is the solution, proposed famously by J. G. A. Pocock, to use the term *Enlightenment* in different ways, depending on the context. On this account, there can be a Protestant Enlightenment and a Catholic Enlightenment; German, Scottish, and French Enlightenments; liberal and conservative Enlightenments; and many more, all of which bear a “family resemblance” to one another, *à la* Wittgenstein’s games, without all having any single identifiable thing in common.³³ This solution presents an appealing alternative to an aggregate definition, in so far as it allows the components to be joined with *or* rather than *and*. Instead of rationality *and* toleration *and* new modes of communication, for example, Enlightenment can mean rationality *or* toleration *or* new modes of communication, which bodes well for those who seek in the Enlightenment the roots of a modernity that encompasses a multitude of differences. But here, too, difficulties abound. To the extent that this solution allows the search for a definition to continue, it redirects that search toward the individual Enlightenments, where our definitional problems are unlikely to diminish. And because in principle it allows us to say little about Enlightenment *per se*, it offers virtually no hope either to those dismayed by the kind of cross-talk that can result from leaving Enlightenment definitionless, or to those who worry that as Enlightenments multiply and the family resemblances grow more and more distant, Enlightenment will grow increasingly empty as a concept, ultimately serving only to conflate—speciously—people, groups, and ideas that were in many respects at odds with one another.³⁴

Even what may seem a reasonable fallback position, to define Enlightenment as simply “the new” or “the modern” in eighteenth-century Europe, presents difficulties above and beyond its potentially off-putting generality. Newness will not suffice on its own: every year ushered in something new, so defining the Enlightenment in terms of newness presupposes some other way of deciding where the Enlightenment’s chronological

2012, 26–27; Anthony J. La Vopa, “A New Intellectual History? Jonathan Israel’s Enlightenment,” *Historical Journal* 52 (2009): 717–38; Antoine Lilti, “Comment écrivon l’histoire intellectuelle des Lumières? Spinozisme, radicalisme, et philosophie,” *Annales* 64 (2009): 171–206; Simon B. Duffy, “Spinoza Today: The Current State of Spinoza Scholarship,” *Intellectual History Review* 19 (2009), 119–20; and Russ Leo, “Cauter: Jonathan Israel’s Secular Modernity,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9 (2008): 76–83. Cf. Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, 8–9; and, in response to some of these criticisms, Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, e.g. 2–3, 10–17.

³³ J. G. A. Pocock, “The Re-Description of Enlightenment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125 (2006): 101–17.

³⁴ Darrin M. McMahon, “Religious Enlightenment: A Useful Category of Research?” (13th International Congress for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Graz, Austria, July 28, 2011); cf. Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 16; and Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, 6.

boundaries should be. And although the duty to provide cultural self-knowledge may require historians to search for the roots of modernity,³⁵ defining Enlightenment in terms of modernity begs at least one question that many historians of the eighteenth century understandably present as beyond the scope of their research, namely how exactly to connect modernity's putative eighteenth-century roots to the treetops of modernity itself in later centuries.

Turning from *Enlightenment* to *religion*, we face problems no less frustrating. How to define the term, and whether it can and should be defined, remain subjects of active debate among philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, and other social scientists.³⁶ Enlightenment historians have tended to take its meaning as intuitively obvious, such that it can be affixed without comment to a wide range of things, including faith or belief ungrounded in rational demonstration; a sense or idea of the sacred, the divine, or the supernatural; belief in miracles; belief in revealed truths; places and practices of worship; specific members of the clergy; ecclesiastical offices and institutions; metaphysics; and theology.³⁷ Pragmatically avoiding explicit and precise definition has, unfortunately, a number of drawbacks. First, it obscures the fact that religion's place in the Enlightenment depends as much on religion's definition as on Enlightenment's. (If the essence of religion is a faith or feeling incapable of rational demonstration, for example, then an Enlightenment defined as fundamentally rational will have no place for it. If religion is defined in terms of institutions and offices, on the other hand, then an Enlightenment whose essence is the emergence of a public sphere will have a place for religion as soon as it can be shown that members of the clergy participated in that emergence.) Second, absent an explicit definition of religion we are left without good tools for answering questions begged by many discussions of eighteenth-century religion: whether one view of God can be regarded as more religious than another, for example, or whether it is more religious to believe that miracles

³⁵ Hollinger, "Enlightenment and the Genealogy of Cultural Conflict," 17.

³⁶ E.g. in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk, eds., *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts, and Contests* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); and Ernst Feil, ed., *On the Concept of Religion*, trans. Brian McNeil (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000). Cf. Hartmut Lehmann, "Von der Erforschung der Säkularisierung zur Forschung von Prozessen der Dechristianisierung und der Rechristianisierung im neuzeitlichen Europa," in *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung, Rechristianisierung im neuzeitlichen Europa: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Lehmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 11.

³⁷ The classic list of forty-eight definitions of *religion*, frequently cited as possible grounds for abandoning the search for any single definition, can be found in James H. Leuba, "Introduction to a Psychological Study of Religion," *Monist* 11 (1901): 195–225. Molendijk, "In Defence of Pragmatism," 3.

violate the natural order than to believe that the inviolability of the natural order is a sign of divine providence, or whether it is more religious to expand than to diminish the clergy's political prerogatives or the political sovereign's authority over religious doctrine.

Terminological ambiguities such as these may be inevitable, but at least one of the dangers they pose is obvious: any discussion of religion and Enlightenment that places weight on the two terms can easily degenerate into either a frustrating exercise in equivocation, in which the constantly shaking definitional ground throws all dialogue off balance, or an unresolvable quarrel over the definitions themselves. The inherent ambiguity of even simple, ubiquitous descriptive statements (e.g. "The Enlightenment was a social process as well as an intellectual movement"), in which it is seldom obvious whether a definition is being explicitly stipulated or merely tacitly applied, only heightens the danger.

And yet despair has not become the norm. Notwithstanding the occasional call to jettison one or the other category entirely,³⁸ *Enlightenment* remains an irresistible canvas for historians to paint visions of its one constant referent, modernity, with all its positive or negative valences; and *religion*, of course, remains embedded in the irresistible question—still alluring even in its most general formulation—of the extent to which, and the respects in which, religion can be regarded as modern. This is one of the fundamental questions addressed by David Sorkin, Jeffrey Burson, and Ulrich Lehner in their newest books. Their answers, though not identical, are similar. Each gives modernity a positive valence; each stipulates a familiar constellation of ideas and attitudes for categorization as religious, enlightened, and modern; and each more or less accepts the bipartite categorical framework propounded by Jonathan Israel—i.e. radical and moderate—and describes enlightened religion or religious Enlightenment as akin to Israel's moderate Enlightenment, while resisting Israel's placement of modernity's mantle so squarely upon the shoulders of the radicals.

David Sorkin presents *The Religious Enlightenment* as an attempt to replace the image of a thoroughly secular Enlightenment with an image of the Enlightenment that can "complicat[e] our understanding of belief's critical and abiding role in modern culture" and thereby reveal the religious roots of political liberalism while teaching us how to narrow the "seemingly unbridgeable chasms between secularists and believers."³⁹ To that end, Sorkin devotes his book to the recovery of a type of eighteenth-century

³⁸ Molendijk, "In Defence of Pragmatism," 5.

³⁹ Sorkin, *Religious Enlightenment*, 1–3, 21, 314.

religion whose learned proponents, while clearly in the orbit of Jonathan Israel's establishment-friendly moderate Enlightenment, have as much claim to a place in modernity's genealogy as do Israel's anticlerical, democratic radicals. In opposition to the militance, dogmatism, and fanaticism that had characterized European religions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,⁴⁰ Sorkin explains, they (1) proposed "reasonable religion" as a "middle way" between various extremes; (2) advocated religious toleration by appealing to principles of natural law; (3) participated eagerly in the republic of letters and the "secular aspects of the public sphere"; and (4) accepted state authority in civil matters while seeking church autonomy in matters of faith.⁴¹ These were learned, cosmopolitan proto-liberals, close to the centers of power in their respective parts of Europe, who "us[ed] the new science and philosophy to promote a tolerant, irenic understanding of belief that could serve a shared morality and politics" and sustain a "multi-confessional polity."⁴²

As evidence for this religious Enlightenment's applicability as a category and for its centrality to eighteenth-century European culture, Sorkin sketches intellectual portraits of six exemplary participants from various times, places, and religions, drawing attention to the common elements of their intellectual projects: William Warburton (1698–1779), priest and learned controversialist in the party of "Moderation" within the Church of England of the 1730s and '40s; Jacob Vernet (1698–1789), theologian and proponent of "Enlightened orthodox" Calvinism in mid-century Geneva; Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten (1706–57), professor of theology in Halle and representative of the Wolffian mainstream of mid-century German Lutheranism; Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), leading representative of enlightened Judaism in the second half of the century in Berlin; Joseph Eybel (1741–1805), leading exponent of reform Catholicism in the Austrian lands and architect of Emperor Joseph II's religious reforms late in the century; and Adrien Lamourette (1742–94), friend and consultant to Mirabeau and prominent advocate of "Christian democracy" in the early years of the French Revolution, whose late and short-lived prominence Sorkin uses to illustrate the comparative meagerness of France's religious Enlightenment.

With the partial and brief exception of Lamourette, the subjects of Sorkin's portraits were hardly committed democrats, and the religious toleration they advocated excluded, among other groups, atheists. For these and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5–6, contra e.g. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Sorkin, *Religious Enlightenment*, 11–18.

⁴² Ibid., 6, 11–19.

other reasons, it is unclear to what extent they can in fact help us find a suitable place for religion in modern liberal democracies, and Sorkin does not press this point hard. Much of the historiographical value of his project, as of his previous book,⁴³ lies in the attention it draws to common theological dynamics within several Christianities and Judaism by explicitly linking Moses Mendelssohn and the Berlin Haskalah to theologians (e.g. Vernet, Baumgarten) and concepts (e.g. reasonableness, toleration) central to the now familiar category of “Christian Enlightenment.”⁴⁴ If, as Sorkin notes, six intellectual portraits do not compose a comprehensive study of these common dynamics, they at least suggest “landmarks” and questions that anyone interested in offering a more comprehensive picture of a religious Enlightenment needs to consider.⁴⁵

One of the most general of these questions, of course, is how far Sorkin’s model of a religious Enlightenment can be pushed, with respect to its prevalence in the eighteenth century and its clarity as a category. With respect to prevalence: precisely how widespread was the constellation of opinions and attitudes represented by Sorkin’s six authors, and where and when could it be found as an aggregate? With respect to clarity: how precisely can religious Enlightenment’s essential features be defined? One of these features, the advocacy of reasonable religion as a middle way between two extremes, is in some cases merely a rhetorical trope: one man’s middle way is often another’s extreme, one man’s reasonableness another’s unreasonableness. Whereas Eybel presented his own Catholicism as a middle way, for example, Vernet presented Catholicism as an extreme.⁴⁶ And most middle ways, like Baumgarten’s hermeneutic theory (“a middle path between Pietism’s subjective exegesis and Orthodoxy’s inspiration theory”)⁴⁷ and Warburton’s theory of justification (a middle way between Puritan enthusiasm and deist unbelief),⁴⁸ do not have much in common simply by virtue of their position between two extremes. But Sorkin often suggests that behind the rhetorical similarities of his six theologians lay similarities of substance. Most of their theologies reflected the impact of Dutch collegialism and Arminianism; made use of natural religion, physico-theology, and historical-critical defenses of the Bible’s authenticity; regarded revelation as above but not contrary to reason; and emphasized

⁴³ Sorkin, *Berlin Haskalah*.

⁴⁴ Rosenblatt, “Christian Enlightenment.”

⁴⁵ Sorkin, *Religious Enlightenment*, xiv.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 70, 258.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

the importance of morality and good practice over assent to doctrine.⁴⁹ A definitive account of a religious Enlightenment will need to consider how precisely these similarities of substance can be defined (so as to ensure their usefulness as analytical categories)⁵⁰ without diminishing the breadth of their applicability by revealing that the details were in many cases hotly contested.⁵¹

The more intractable question, not answerable by further research alone, is whether the boundaries of a religious Enlightenment should be drawn as Sorkin has drawn them. The answer depends in large part upon what any given historian wishes to include within *Enlightenment's* modern penumbra, and to what extent he or she is willing, for the sake of avoiding definitional quarrels, to accept multiple distinct religious Enlightenments, multiple religious Enlightenments related by "family resemblance," or a single, intuitively recognizable but undefined religious Enlightenment. Some may want to erase support for a centralizing state or even "reasonableness" from the list of essential characteristics, so that various kinds of toleration-seeking Protestant dissenters and "enthusiasts" can find a place among modernity's progenitors.⁵² Others may object to Sorkin's exclusion of early eighteenth-century Lutheran Pietists (including Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten's teachers) from the religious Enlightenment, pointing to their interest in new science and mathematics, their historical-critical biblical scholarship, their visibility in the public sphere, and their alliance with the modernizing Prussian state.⁵³ Those who take theism to be the essential characteristic of religion and find anticlericalism inoffensive may want to find a way of including a variety of deists. Still others may want to include among religious Enlightenment's essential characteristics not only opinions and attitudes but also practices of piety.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid., e.g. 13–15, 32–3, 42–3, 60, 115, 130.

⁵⁰ On the capacity of excessively general definitions to dissolve the "historical moorings" of their referents, cf. Hans Schneider, *German Radical Pietism*, trans. Gerald T. McDonald (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 183, criticizing F. E. Stoeffler's unusually broad definition of Pietism.

⁵¹ Cf. Thomas Ahnert's resistance to Sorkin's portrayal of reason in *Berlin Haskalah* as a "central and self-evident principle" in early Enlightenment Germany, in *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment*, 122.

⁵² As suggested, for example, by contributors to Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and Religion*. Cf. Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment*, 2–3, 122–23.

⁵³ E.g. Kelly Whitmer, "Eclecticism and the Technologies of Discernment in Pietist Pedagogy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009), 545–67; and Kelly Whitmer, "Learning to See in the Pietist Orphanage: Geometry, Philanthropy and the Science of Perfection, 1695–1730" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 2008). Cf. Sorkin's more inclusive treatment of Pietism in *Berlin Haskalah*, 15.

⁵⁴ E.g. Ulrich L. Lehner, "Review of *The Religious Enlightenment*, by David Sorkin," *Journal of Religion* 92 (2012): 161.

Jeffrey Burson's alternative to the religious Enlightenment sketched by Sorkin is a less definition-bound, internally more multiplex "European Theological Enlightenment."⁵⁵ One part of it is represented in *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment* by a group Sorkin and others pointedly exclude: Jesuits and their theological allies in early- and mid-century France. What makes them worthy of inclusion, Burson argues, rather than the counter-Enlightenment obstacle on the road to modernity that they are often taken to be,⁵⁶ is the viability of their apologetic theology—or in Sorkin's vocabulary, the reasonableness of their religion. To advance this argument, Burson frames his book as a challenge to Jonathan Israel's critique of the broader moderate Enlightenment to which Burson assigns the Jesuits. On Israel's account, the moderate Enlightenment lost its prestige in France because its weaknesses as an intellectual system inevitably made it "unable to win the intellectual battles" of mid-century.⁵⁷ Burson, by contrast, considers the mid-century decline of the moderate Enlightenment not a case study in intellectual evolution, in which the fittest ideas survive and their feeble counterparts justly perish, but rather a tragedy, in which a powerful and pitiable hero is brought down by forces beyond his control, unwittingly and unnecessarily stepping into precisely the trap he has been trying to avoid.⁵⁸ Burson's hero is the internally divided Gallican Church—and particularly the open-minded, philosophically sophisticated, institutionally well-placed Jesuit theologians of the 1730s and '40s, who in the 1750s, under pressure from the anti-Lockean and anti-*philosophe* polemics of their Jansenist enemies, foolishly traded a powerful, Locke- and Malebranche-inspired, moderate-Enlightenment apologetics for a "still-born" counter-Enlightenment alternative, thereby leaving the Church at the mercy of the radical, deistic critiques that it had once possessed the intellectual resources to rebut.⁵⁹

The critical moment in this extremely complicated story, in Burson's

⁵⁵ Burson, *Rise and Fall*, 7.

⁵⁶ Burson, *Rise and Fall*, 9, takes issue not only implicitly with the standard relegation of the Jesuits to the counter-Enlightenment and exclusion from the Catholic Enlightenment, but also explicitly with the conflation of Catholic and counter-Enlightenments in Darrin M. McMahon's *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). On opposition to the Jesuits as a hallmark of Catholic Enlightenment: Michael Printy, *Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 16; and Ulrich L. Lehner, "The Many Faces of the Catholic Enlightenment," in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Lehner and Printy (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 31.

⁵⁷ Burson, *Rise and Fall*, 5, 7–8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 102, 136–37, 298–99, 307–9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 242–43, 300, et passim.

view, came in 1752, when the Sorbonne's Jesuit-dominated theology faculty decided to censure the dissertation of one of its students, Jean Martin de Prades (1724–82). The “Prades Affair,” as the scandal surrounding this decision was known, is the focus of Burson's book. By means of an elaborate explication and intellectual and institutional contextualization of Prades's dissertation, Burson argues that far from being the mouthpiece of an isolated group of *philosophe*-sympathizers at the Sorbonne, as he has sometimes been characterized,⁶⁰ Prades was in fact an exponent of the “Jesuit synthesis”: mainstream Jesuit apologetic arguments, based on a synthesis of ideas drawn from Locke and Malebranche and familiar at the Sorbonne at least since the early 1730s. In line with this mainstream apologetical system, Prades argued (among other things) that the need for revelation, faith, and the Church followed necessarily from fallen man's enslavement to sense perception and from the weakness of human reason, and that historical criticism could vindicate the divine origins of the Pentateuch and shield biblically attested miracles from deistic critiques.⁶¹ The dissertation therefore should have been unobjectionable, and in fact it initially escaped censure.⁶² But the faculty later reversed itself, Burson explains, for a complex set of reasons. These included, especially importantly, the faculty's desire to protect its own corporate privileges (essentially its prerogative of censorship over its own members) from the threat of usurpation by the Paris Parlement, which was dominated by Jansenists hostile to the Jesuits and bent on retaliation for their own expulsion from the Sorbonne in 1729.⁶³ The clandestine circulation of Spinozistic and deistic manuscripts had been increasing, and *philosophes* such as Diderot and D'Alembert had been growing more radical in their materialism, for which they acknowledged a Lockean basis.⁶⁴ Prades's thesis, based on the Locke-inspired Jesuit synthesis and bearing some resemblance to materials in the *Encyclopédie*, gave the Jansenists the opening they had been seeking. In their ensuing propaganda campaign against the Sorbonne faculty, whom they accused of conspiring with the *philosophes* and of being unfit to police the orthodoxy of their students, the attention they drew to the *philosophes*' materialist interpretation of Locke made him radioactive. Cowed, the Sorbonne faculty decided to flee the radiation instead of abating it. They censored Prades's thesis in order to keep the Parlement from doing it for them,

⁶⁰ Including in Thomas O'Connor, *An Irish Theologian in Enlightenment France: Luke Joseph Hooke (1714–96)* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995).

⁶¹ Burson, *Rise and Fall*, e.g. 64–76, 139–40, 208, 228.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 240–41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 79, 108–13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 56–63, 156–58.

in effect repudiating their own apologetical system and rendering it anathema. Ultimately, this maneuver failed: by the mid-1750s the Sorbonne's censors were enforcing a Jansenist-like orthodoxy, and the Jesuits, tainted by association with Locke despite their best efforts at self-repudiation, were expelled in 1762–64.⁶⁵ The tragedy, in Burson's view, is that the Jesuits' unforced error completed the process of intellectual polarization that left eighteenth-century France with separate and bitterly opposed radical and counter-Enlightenments, and relegated religion to the intellectually moribund counter-Enlightenment, from which it now deserves to be rescued.⁶⁶

If Sorkin's religious Enlightenment is distinguished by qualities such as reasonableness and toleration, which make it a potentially worthy object of study for modern advocates of religious pluralism, and if Burson's example of theological Enlightenment is distinguished particularly by the sophistication of its Locke-inspired apologetics, what marks the religious Enlightenment presented by Ulrich Lehner in *Enlightened Monks* is worldliness and openness to intellectual and cultural innovation, reminiscent of the 1962–65 Second Vatican Council. That, Lehner suggests, is where the kind of theology evident among the subjects of his book, eighteenth-century German and Austrian Benedictine monks, fully resurfaced after their monasteries were dissolved in 1806.⁶⁷ These monks, contrary to the popular stereotype that Lehner criticizes, did not cling to old traditions as the world changed around them. Faced with the "challenges" posed by the new ideas and modes of life presented by Lehner as characteristic of the Enlightenment, many monks showed themselves receptive and eager to adapt.

Lehner identifies eight occasionally overlapping categories of Enlightenment challenge and describes, chapter by chapter, how Benedictine monks adapted to each.⁶⁸ (1) Impressed by the methods of historical scholarship developed by the French Maurists in the seventeenth century and promulgated in Germany in the early eighteenth, German Benedictines followed the Maurist example and over several decades developed a new "historical consciousness" and a commitment to producing works of historical scholarship.⁶⁹ (2) Tempted by the allure of worldly pastimes, monks discarded many of their old ascetic ways and embraced the new: coffee, snuff, secular theater, dancing, gaming and gambling, fashionable clothes, and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 276, 282–84, 289–91.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, e.g. 299–300, 307–9.

⁶⁷ Lehner, *Enlightened Monks*, 225.

⁶⁸ What follows is of course a highly selective and simplified summary.

⁶⁹ Lehner, *Enlightened Monks*, 226, 11–26.

more. Silence and time for prayer diminished, while leisure time, meat consumption, and resistance to the tonsure increased.⁷⁰ (3) Inspired by new ideas of liberty and rights, monks increasingly challenged the authority of their abbots, and some ultimately looked to revolutionary France for liberation from monastic tyranny.⁷¹ (4) Surrounded by learned networks of communication and a developing public sphere, monks participated, contributing scientific research and other scholarship of their own.⁷² (5) General trends in prison reform made themselves evident in monastic prisons, too, as melancholy and otherwise discontented monks came increasingly to be treated with mercy.⁷³ (6) Faced with new legal theories, particularly natural-law-based arguments for subjecting the church to state control, a “critical number” of monks embraced natural law theory, and monasteries increasingly subordinated themselves to the jurisdiction of bishops.⁷⁴ Finally, in response to the new science and to philosophical innovations by Leibniz, Locke, Wolff, and Kant, Benedictine centers of learning—primarily the University of Salzburg—modified their curricula as major Benedictine philosophers and theologians took steps to “modernize” Catholic (7) philosophy and (8) theology.⁷⁵

As this list of challenges and responses suggests, Lehner’s enlightened monks represent a particularly capacious religious Enlightenment, marked by a more eclectic set of noteworthy characteristics than Sorkin’s or Burson’s. Lehner’s shares with theirs an investment in historical scholarship, an enthusiastic involvement in the international scholarly community, and a respect for major eighteenth-century philosophers such as Locke and Wolff. But it is somewhat lighter than Sorkin’s on religious toleration, and it is heavier than both on prison reform and on general enthusiasm about the material boons of commercial society. What unites this eclectic collection of elements, and what constitutes the essence of Enlightenment in Lehner’s account, is newness and modernity, and Lehner takes pains to suggest that the Benedictines’ embrace of this modernity was to their credit. Their scientific and theological scholarship, for example, was “remarkable” and “groundbreaking,” their interlibrary loan system “sophisticated,” and their achievements “great” (as in the case of the “undeservedly forgotten” Scottish Benedictine Andrew Gordon).⁷⁶ Nor, in Lehner’s view, did the Benedictines’ embrace of modernity mean a departure from their order’s or

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27–53, 100–102.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 226, 54–79.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 226, 80–102.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 103–20, 226.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 226, 155–74.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 227, 175–225.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 85, 101, 191, 227.

Catholicism's fundamental ideals. Lehner does note the weakening of discipline and the diminishing emphasis on asceticism and prayer, and he concedes that the "growth in personal individualism" among monks could be dangerous within religious communities. But he rejects the conventional view that the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a "crisis of vocations" or that religious life was in decline,⁷⁷ and he suggests that those Benedictines who decided to abandon "outdated patterns of behavior" were choosing to preserve "the essential core of their vocational life."⁷⁸

The extent to which the Benedictine order as a whole can be said to belong to a religious Enlightenment is a question whose answer Lehner must leave tantalizingly ambiguous. Given the nature of the available sources, even the extensive research on which Lehner's book is based cannot produce numbers that would support a statistical survey of how many Benedictines could be classified as "Enlighteners." Much of the evidentiary burden of the book's argument is borne by the many anecdotes and individual biographical portraits that enliven the more general narrative. These present a mixed picture. Some of the most gripping anecdotes concern monks led by discontent to desert their monasteries, violate the rules, become involved in serious controversy, or even abandon Catholicism.⁷⁹ Some embraced radicalism of one kind or another, while others did not.⁸⁰ The Enlightenmenters were clearly in many respects a motley group, whose members did not welcome all innovations equally, and whose embrace of some innovations often led to their marginalization. As for their relative numbers and importance among the Benedictines as a whole, Lehner notes that the order also contained outspoken opponents of change.⁸¹ And, he points out, even if we can assume that many monks silently sympathized with the more outspoken advocates of Enlightenment, we can also assume that the reason for their silence was knowledge that the authorities' sympathies lay elsewhere.⁸²

In defending the modernity of some kind of eighteenth-century religion, all three of these books illustrate the value of such a defense even for those who may consider the question of religion's modernity uninteresting, overly general, or otherwise badly posed. Pursuing that question, as these books attest, has begun to correct a long-standing, institutionally reinforced

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, e.g. 123–44, 183–87, 207–12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, e.g. 59, 114.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6–10.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

defect in the study of eighteenth-century European intellectual history, by showing that intellectual historians cannot understand most eighteenth-century ideas and arguments without knowledge of eighteenth-century theology and theological controversies, and that they therefore have a great deal to learn from theologians and historians of religion. In light of the Enlightenment's putative anti-religiosity, it has long been easy for historians to consider this kind of knowledge largely superfluous and its acquisition not urgent.⁸³ But it is clearly becoming more and more common to recognize that eighteenth-century authors, including those conventionally considered participants in the Enlightenment, either had formal theological training or were at least embedded in an intellectual culture in which theological issues were important subjects of discussion—and consequently that historians must know something about theology in order to understand what these people were writing about.

This growing recognition has had at least two important effects. One effect has been the growth of mainstream scholarly interest in eighteenth-century theologians who were important in their own time but until recently had been attended to only by specialists or church historians.⁸⁴ This effect is illustrated by the burgeoning field of Catholic Enlightenment studies, advanced in the English-speaking world in the last three years not only by Burson's and Lehner's books, but also by Michael Printy's recovery and reconstruction of eighteenth-century German Catholic ecclesiological-political debates, and by various briefer forays into other national contexts.⁸⁵ A second effect has been to motivate reinvestigations of obviously important texts, people, and events whose significance once seemed clear but often turns out to have been misunderstood. Burson's reinterpretation of the Prades Affair, of course, is one recent example of such a reinvestigation. A less recent example, worth recounting because of its big impact, is the reinvestigation of David Hume's failed bid for the professorship of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in 1744–45. Long taken as a classic case of the enlightened heretic victimized by benighted church authorities—in this particular case, by those Presbyterian ministers who instigated opposition to Hume and by those who vetoed his candidacy—the story began to look different in the early 1990s to a group of scholars,

⁸³ On the widespread mental barriers to the study of religious texts, cf. Breuer, "Einleitung," xiii.

⁸⁴ On the ghettoization and self-ghettoization of religious history, cf. Gregory, "Transforming 'the Age of Reason,'" 293–94.

⁸⁵ Printy, *Enlightenment and the Creation of German Catholicism*; and Printy and Lehner, eds., *Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*.

including M. A. Stewart and James Moore, attuned to the fact that not all Presbyterian ministers were the same. They sought and found new sources, and on the basis of those sources they established that Hume had been rejected not simply because of his alleged atheism, but rather because he disagreed with Francis Hutcheson, among the other Presbyterian ministers and professors who agitated against him, about whether justice was fundamentally a self-interested or an altruistic virtue.⁸⁶ In other words, the clash was not between religion and Enlightenment. Among its other ramifications, this reinterpretation called into question one of the longest-standing and most influential organizing principles of the history of British moral philosophy, which divided moral theorists into *rationalists* and *sentimentalists* according to whether they considered moral judgment more a matter of reason or of sentiment. By showing that Hume and Hutcheson, both sentimentalists, had in fact had a big quarrel about a separate issue, Stewart and Moore revealed that the rationalist-sentimentalist classification sometimes does no justice to eighteenth-century Scottish philosophers' own conscious concerns.⁸⁷ This reinvestigation is one of the pivotal events in Scottish Enlightenment research of the last thirty years.

Still another example is Thomas Ahnert's reinvestigation of Christian Thomasius (1655–1738), professor of law and philosophy at Halle in the early eighteenth century and the subject of Ahnert's *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment*. Thomasius's preeminence among the founding luminaries of the German Enlightenment is a commonplace, and

⁸⁶ The results of this research can be found primarily in M. A. Stewart, *The Kirk and the Infidel: An Inaugural Lecture delivered at Lancaster University on 9 November 1994* (1994; repr., Lancaster: Lancaster University Press, 2001); James Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," in *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 23–57; James Moore, "A Scots-Irish Bookseller in Holland: William Smith of Amsterdam (1698–1741)," *Eighteenth-Century Scotland* 7 (1993): 8–11; James Moore and M. A. Stewart, "William Smith and the Dissenters' Book Trade," *Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland* 22 (1993): 21–26; and, with greater emphasis on issues of ideology and institutional politics, Richard Sher, "Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century," in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 87–126; and Roger Emerson, "The 'Affair' at Edinburgh and the 'Project' at Glasgow: The Politics of Hume's Attempts to Become a Professor," in Stewart and Wright, eds., *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, 1–22. The older interpretation of Hutcheson's opposition to Hume's candidacy, now superseded, is Ernest Mossner's, in *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. 157–60.

⁸⁷ For skepticism about this point, see David Fate Norton, "Hume and Hutcheson: The Question of Influence," in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 2 (2005): 211–12; and, in reply, James Moore, "The Eclectic Stoic, the Mitigated Sceptic," in *New Essays on David Hume*, ed. E. Mazza and E. Ronchetti (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007), 133–70.

at least in the German-speaking world he has long been a subject of scholarly attention. In recent years, a prevailing tendency has been to identify him primarily as a major figure in the longer history of German or European natural law theory, and to characterize him as jurisprudential architect of the post-Westphalian “de-confessionalized” state and progenitor of a secular liberalism happily lacking the vulnerabilities of Kantian deontology.⁸⁸ He is often taken to have advocated insulating philosophy from religious questions; and accordingly, the ideas, references, and texts of his that happen to seem particularly religious have been explained away as marginal to his central project.⁸⁹ These ideas, references, and texts are Ahnert’s starting point. The result is a systematic reconstruction of Thomasius’s thought that places the religious ideas close to the center of the system and makes the interpretation of Thomasius as a champion of secularism appear hard to sustain.

The overlooked “religious ideas” recovered by Ahnert are primarily Thomasius’s theory of salvation and the theories of human psychological anatomy that informed it. By way of reconstructing Thomasius’s early- and mid-career quarrels with orthodox Lutheran and Pietist colleagues in Leipzig and Halle, all set against the backdrop of the rise of devotional piety in the seventeenth century, Ahnert lays out Thomasius’s “heterodox” view that salvation is unaided by the exercise of the intellect and does not depend in any way on assent to theoretical doctrine. Salvation in fact requires the development of what Thomasius calls “reasonable love” [*amor rationalis*]: a longing for God that follows a lengthy process of moral regeneration completed by divine intervention, such that the three natural passions of avarice, ambition, and lust are either reined in by the supernatural “divine spark” present in every human being (Thomasius’s earlier view), or are brought into balance with one another (Thomasius’s later view). The Bible is a helpful guide to this process of moral regeneration, but it is not a repository of doctrinal opinion—which is irrelevant to the process anyway.⁹⁰ Those who, like the orthodox Lutherans, insisted that the Bible was in fact such a repository, that it required philosophically sophisticated exegesis in order to be understood, and that understanding and intellectually assenting

⁸⁸ E.g. Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and *The Secularisation of the Confessional State: The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁹ Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment*, 1–2, 27.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27–40.

to its teachings was essential to salvation, Thomasius accused of *scholasticism*. A scholastic insistence on the necessity of assent to doctrine, Thomasius charged, was nothing more than a pretext for the “papalist” clergy to secure illegitimate secular power for themselves by, among other means, providing the Bible with philosophical glosses legitimating that power.⁹¹

These accusations of scholasticism and anti-papalism, together with the theory of salvation underlying them, are in Ahnert’s account a *Leitmotiv* running through Thomasius’s thought, and they in fact provide the basis for many of the apparently secular ideas that compose his putatively “enlightened reform program.”⁹² Thomasius’s championing of a prince’s right to intervene in church affairs, for example, is not quite the secularizing political philosophy it may appear to be. Thomasius in fact derives the right primarily from the prince’s duty to promote godliness in his territory, and from the presupposition that doctrine, as well as most church ceremony, is irrelevant to salvation and is therefore not the exclusive domain of Brandenburg-Prussia’s “papalist” Lutheran clergy.⁹³ The same theory of salvation and the “anti-papalism” based on it, Ahnert explains, inform Thomasius’s extensive writings on church history and Roman law.⁹⁴ They are also buttressed by hermetic- and mystical-looking writings on natural philosophy, in which Thomasius describes matter as imbued with spiritual beings unknowable by human reason.⁹⁵ Even the natural law theories for which Thomasius is best known reflect these ideas. According to Ahnert, Thomasius’s oft-puzzled-over evolution, from a defender of Pufendorf’s divine-command conception of moral obligation into an exponent of a very different conception, based on analysis of the human passions and a denial of the will’s freedom, was not a response merely to debates about voluntarism and essentialism now familiar in the historiography of natural law theory⁹⁶; it also reflected changes in the theory of psychological anatomy with which Thomasius supported his theory of salvation.⁹⁷

Among the many implications of this new portrait of Thomasius are two important reminders in the ongoing search for viable definitions of Enlightenment and religious Enlightenment. First, if Thomasius is a quintessential early German Enlightenment figure, and if *religion* can be taken to

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, e.g. 40–2, 73–80, 88–89.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4–5 et passim.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44–56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59–68, 73–80.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 107–19.

⁹⁶ As presented, notably, in Schneewind, *Invention of Autonomy*.

⁹⁷ Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment*, 94–101.

refer to ideas about salvation, then we must acknowledge the “deeply religious preoccupations at the heart of the early German Enlightenment” and, by extension, at the heart of the apparently secular reform programs it generated.⁹⁸ Second, if by the same token Thomasius’s religion can be considered an example of religious Enlightenment, then we must acknowledge that rationality, so important to Sorkin’s description of religious Enlightenment but disparaged by Thomasius, was in fact a “contested notion” and is not an uncomplicatedly viable component in religious Enlightenment’s definition.⁹⁹ All these ifs are hardly trivial, of course, and in response Sorkin might well abide by his own definition as stipulated and happily exclude Thomasius from the religious Enlightenment. He would thereby convert the matter into a frustrating and familiar kind of definitional quarrel. But no less important a lesson to draw from Ahnert’s book—as from Sorkin’s, Burson’s, and Lehner’s—is how obviously our understanding of the historical record can benefit from debate about religion and Enlightenment, whatever that debate’s terminological ambiguities and other defects.¹⁰⁰ If the debate continues to restore knowledge of theology to intellectual historians’ standard repertoire and to open the lines of communication between intellectual historians and theologians, then its persistence should be a cause for celebration rather than despair.¹⁰¹

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⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 122. Cf. Carl Hinrichs, *Preußentum und Pietismus: Der Pietismus in Brandenburg-Preußen als religiös-soziale Reformbewegung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 352–53, 362–63.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Sheehan, “Enlightenment,” 1064, 1075.

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