

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Twenty-first Century Enlightenment

*Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement.* By Stephen Eric Bronner. (Columbia University Press, 2004.)

*Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust.* By Ira Katznelson. (Columbia University Press, 2003.)

*Enlightenment against Empire.* By Sankar Muthu. (Princeton University Press, 2003.)

*Women, Gender and Enlightenment.* Edited by Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.)

The Enlightenment was a constellation of eighteenth-century North Atlantic intellectuals, artists, and political actors debating questions of truth, morality, religion, aesthetics, and justice. It helped demolish European monarchies and aristocracies, foment the American and French Revolutions, and lay the theoretical foundations for the modern university, capitalism, liberalism, and democracy. Its meaning and practice differed for Diderot and Voltaire in France, Kant and Mendelssohn in Germany, Smith and Hume in Scotland, Wollstonecraft and Godwin in Britain, and Franklin and Jefferson in the United States. Though many scholars pluralize the Enlightenment—highlighting distinctions between thinkers and countries—Stephen Eric Bronner, Ira Katznelson, Sankar Muthu, and Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott maintain that the utility of the concept outweighs its temporal, geographical, and thematic breadth.

The Enlightenment endures around the world today, as persons and groups from diverse philosophical and religious perspectives orient themselves by it. It persists whenever people argue about the principles of the U.S. Constitution, the relation between church and state, the basis of human rights, or academic curricula. Each of these discussions draws

upon its intellectual and political legacy. How we view the Enlightenment affects our self-understanding as its heirs.

These four books bridge the academic disciplines of history, political science, and philosophy. Each author excavates the historical Enlightenment for insights about the contemporary Enlightenment. Bronner advocates an enlightened model of political engagement committed to the ideals of liberalism, socialism, democracy, and cosmopolitanism. Katznelson endorses a political studies enlightenment that entwines normative social science with cognizance of the radical evil manifest in the early twentieth century. Muthu discovers an anti-imperialist strain in the philosophies of Diderot, Kant, and Herder that deepens our thinking about cultural pluralism. Knott and Taylor find concepts and exemplars for modern feminism in the proto-feminist voices of Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, and other philosophes. Each book combines rigorous historical scholarship with thoughtful attention to present-day politics.

“There is hardly a single ideal of the left,” Bronner notes, “that does not derive from the Enlightenment” (60). All four books agree that the Enlightenment remains an intellectual, moral, and political resource for the Left, whose future may depend upon whether and how it revitalizes the Enlightenment. These four books are a guide, drawing upon the Enlightenment to enrich the Left’s understanding of human dignity, progress, social science, globalization, feminism, and many other topics.

One theme of eighteenth century philosophy—articulated by Jefferson, Kant, and Wollstonecraft, among others—is that each person and each generation has the right to create its own concepts to address its own problems. My immanent critique of these books is that they sometimes assume that the Enlightenment’s core doctrines have been conclusively determined. In this review, I suggest that the Enlightenment at the dawn of the twenty-first century necessitates as much conceptual innovation as was displayed by its eighteenth century predecessor.

In *Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement*, Bronner aims to correct a derogatory view of the Enlightenment perpetuated by

the Right and postmodern Left. Enlightenment intellectuals enunciated ideals of global awareness, economic justice, democratic citizenship, and the “good society.” They epitomize how intellectuals should intervene in the world in a pragmatic and principled manner. Above all, “they provide a historical and speculative orientation for progressive activists and intellectuals” (x). Bronner defends the spirit and ideals of the Enlightenment for liberals, democrats, socialists, and others on the Left.

Bronner rescues the Enlightenment from conservative critics, such as Strauss and his followers, as well as postmodernists, such as Horkheimer and Adorno, who argue that the Enlightenment is a historical artifact that contributed to the rise of National Socialism. Bronner’s main target is Horkheimer and Adorno’s 1947 work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This work “initiated a radical change in critical theory” and “surrendered any systematic concern with social movements and political institutions” (4). Horkheimer and Adorno substituted aesthetic criticism for political resistance and opacity for clear prose, all the while gesturing towards a positive notion of Enlightenment. Bronner’s book “is an attempt to provide the sequel that Horkheimer and Adorno never wrote in a style they refused to employ” (5), and thus systematically re-describes the topics addressed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. *Reclaiming* has chapters on progress, liberalism, the public sphere, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, the culture industry, cosmopolitanism, and nature.

Bronner tells another side of Horkheimer and Adorno’s story. The chapter on progress, for example, proposes a new mythic figure for the Enlightenment. Horkheimer and Adorno argued that it is Odysseus, a hero who had to surrender his name and identity to survive, while Bronner proposes Prometheus or Icarus, both of whom sought to improve the human condition through knowledge (29). Bronner presents a humane and tragic side to the Enlightenment that is neglected by Horkheimer and Adorno’s sweeping and unsympathetic overview. Bronner makes a compelling case that the contemporary Left should study the Enlightenment lest it “constantly find itself intellectually reinventing the wheel” (7).

Bronner concludes by considering how the Enlightenment ought to adapt to the problems of the new millennium. He argues that the Enlightenment should show a greater and more nuanced appreciation of institutions, reexamine the role of technology in causing and confronting environmental disasters, and bolster its view of liberty to account for the rise of fanaticism.

Bronner warns against “the esoteric and metaphysical vagaries of fashionable pseudo-political philosophical currents” (xiii). Granted, several prominent recent philosophers seem to court nonsense. Yet the contemporary Enlightenment celebrates many texts ridiculed in their time for obscurity and heterodoxy, e.g., Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1677) or Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). A distinguishing mark of the Enlightenment is an openness to alternate viewpoints, even when politically inexpedient. Bronner exercises this prerogative when he argues that animal rights is a “logical extension” of Enlightenment ethics (161). This controversial claim parallels Derrida’s discussion of “animality” and “anthropocentric dogmatism” in his essay, “And Say the Animal Responded?” (2003). The Enlightenment should tolerate thinkers stuttering in the process of creating new concepts.

Katznelson’s *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* considers how social scientists might reanimate the Enlightenment after its ideals and aspirations were seemingly obliterated in the Second World War. The Enlightenment bequeathed the West both the image of a humane, liberal, democratic culture in which diverse faiths coexist peacefully, as well as the analytic tools of the social sciences. What the eighteenth century Enlightenment did not foresee was the form radical evil would take in the twentieth century. The task of conceptualizing the unique traumas of our age—“total war,” “totalitarianism,” and the “holocaust”—was taken up by a coterie of postwar intellectuals that Katznelson deems “the political studies enlightenment.” Katznelson explains the accomplishments and limits of the political studies enlightenment to provide bearing to contemporary social scientists.

The leading figures of the political studies enlightenment, according to Katznelson, were Hannah Arendt, Robert Dahl, Richard Hofstadter, Harold Lasswell, Charles Lindblom, Karl Polanyi, and David Truman. Their initial task was to understand the origin and nature of the desolation that had engulfed Western civilization. Arendt took up this project in her account of the rise of anti-Semitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as did Polanyi in his account of the breakdown of Europe’s political and economic institutions in *The Great Transformation*. The next task of the political studies enlightenment was to determine how the state and public policy could fashion and sustain a decent political order. Truman’s *The Governmental Process* and Hofstadter’s *The American Political Tradition* are par-

adigms of this scholarship. Katznelson shows how the political studies enlightenment both “drew on the full array of philosophical, historical, and social scientific resources the Enlightenment offered” and revised those resources to account for “their epoch’s remarkable aggregate of suffering” (43). By recounting this history, Katznelson motivates practicing social scientists to revivify the political studies enlightenment and overcome its residual elitism and indifference to class, cultural, and gender inequality.

Katznelson’s genealogy of postwar American political science demonstrates that most contemporary political scientists participate, consciously or not, in the Enlightenment. Not only does this help explain what political scientists do, it places upon them a moral responsibility. For postwar political scientists, “the United States stood tall as the historical counterfactual, thus soliciting close scrutiny of its political tradition, fresh accounts of its liberal regime, and focused inquiry about the singular personality of its liberal state” (106). Students of American politics, on this account, investigate and thus bolster the political order that defeated totalitarianism and salvaged the Enlightenment.

Katznelson acknowledges that Arendt’s inclusion in this group may surprise political scientists who doubt that she is “a systematic social scientist or historian, let alone a political liberal” (3). Could Michel Foucault be included in an updated political studies enlightenment? *Discipline and Punish* is a philosophical history of the rise of the modern prison that entwines institutional analysis with normative concerns. “What is Enlightenment?” may be the most famous essay on the topic in the past quarter century. Foucault invents a concept (“disciplinary society”) that may help grasp American political institutions after the increase in government surveillance and control after 9/11. By the end of his life, Foucault was writing a sympathetic history of liberalism. Katznelson’s allusions to Foucault in *Desolation and Enlightenment* are disparaging, e.g., Foucault and his followers “rethink the modern state in ways that unduly endanger its Enlightenment foundations” (116). My concern is not primarily that Katznelson may misread Foucault; it is that his summary dismissal of postmodernism dampens the intellectual life of the social sciences. Voltaire’s humiliation of Rousseau is one of the least attractive legacies of the Enlightenment; Katznelson could learn from that episode and welcome eccentric thinkers in a new political studies enlightenment.

Muthu’s *Enlightenment against Empire* reveals an anti-imperialist line of argument submerged in stan-

dard accounts of the Enlightenment. Scholars of the period influenced by Hegel, Marx, Mill, and Tocqueville, as well as post-colonial theorists, often take for granted that the Enlightenment was committed to exporting its ideals, just as the French did after the Revolution. Muthu recovers and reconstructs the arguments of the Enlightenment anti-imperialists to complicate our understanding of the era and to explain how universal ideals can flourish alongside cultural diversity.

Muthu focuses on three seminal philosophers of the Enlightenment: Diderot, Kant, and Herder. For each author, Muthu explicates the theorists’ views of human nature, culture, and global justice. Muthu’s key claim is that these philosophers believed that all humans have the same basic faculties but that humans and cultures employ these faculties in different and equally dignified ways. For the Enlightenment anti-imperialists, “human beings are fundamentally cultural creatures, that is, they possess and exercise, simply by virtue of being human, a range of rational, emotive, aesthetic, and imaginative capacities that create, sustain, and transform diverse practices and institutions over time” (7–8). Muthu then shows how the conception of human nature as cultural agency underlies these philosophers’ arguments against European imperialism.

Muthu illuminates the philosophies of Diderot, Kant, and Herder, and the analogies between them, in helpful ways. In a recent masterpiece on early modern German intellectual history, *Rival Enlightenments* (2001), Ian Hunter places Kant in the “metaphysical enlightenment” and argues that Kant viewed the human being as a *homo duplex* whose only value resides in the noumenal realm. Muthu shows that this interpretation does not suffice for Kant’s position after the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) or the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Muthu scrutinizes Kant’s account of humanity in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) as well as that book’s defense of nomadic and pastoral peoples. Muthu shows that Kant’s late political writings share “the spirit (and perhaps even some of the letter) of Diderot’s anti-imperialism” (123).

Muthu offers his history to help forge a path between moral particularism and moral universalism. The Enlightenment anti-imperialists deny that human beings are either rational agents or cultural beings; we are both, embedded in culture and capable of transforming that culture. Muthu could expand upon how he wishes to bring this strand of Enlightenment thinking into the present. More precisely, he could describe what kind of moral psychology he thinks germane for

contemporary political theory. Diderot, Kant, and Herder agree that humans are born with the same basic faculties and diverge in how they conceptualize the human faculties: Kant, for example, posits a faculty of pure practical reason unknown to Diderot and denied by Herder. How does Muthu propose to balance the competing mental portraits of these authors? And what does Muthu think of subsequent discoveries and innovations in faculty psychology made by, say, Freud and Rawls? Muthu succeeds in reconstructing eighteenth-century arguments against imperialism. In his future work, he might elaborate what an anti-imperialist Enlightenment looks like in the twenty-first century.

Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor's edited volume, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* traces the links between Enlightenment and the rise of feminism. The book is the product of a research project, "Feminism and Enlightenment 1650–1850: A Comparative History" that became the Gender and Enlightenment Research Network. The project incorporates hundreds of associates from diverse academic disciplines from around the globe, "making this probably the largest comparative study of Enlightenment ever undertaken" (ix). This book is a treasure trove for scholars of the Enlightenment and feminists mining the Enlightenment for ideas.

The essays in this volume cover dozens of topics and indicate where future researchers may break new ground. The time span ranges from seventeenth century Cartesian feminism to the American women's rights movement in the nineteenth century. Countries discussed include France, Britain, Italy, Spain, and the United States, with the flagged omissions of Germany, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The book mentions prominent Enlightenment philosophers—Rousseau, Kant, Hume, Voltaire, and Wollstonecraft—and introduces new authors into the Enlightenment canon—Catharine Macaulay, Mary Hays, Olympe de Gouges, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Helen Maria Williams. Themes of the volume include women's role in Enlightenment conjectural histories; enlightened pedagogy for women; the practices by which feminist ideas circulated throughout Europe and the United States; the role of religion in inspiring and sustaining early feminist efforts; and Enlightenment ideas about personal and gender identity. Some essays focus on the treatment of women by abstract philosophers; many discuss women's participation in the Enlightenment as "essayists, novelists, scientists, salonnières, teachers, translators, moral didacts, theologians, poets" (xvii). The volume should inspire innumerable dissertations, essays, books, and journals.

It also contains many surprises and lively debates. One example concerns the topic of "gallantry," the idea that men should defer to the superior virtue and moral sensitivity of women. In "Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightened Britain," Taylor approves of Wollstonecraft's unrelenting assault on this notion as advanced by Hume and others in the Scottish Enlightenment: "The enlightened gallants criticized in the *Rights of Woman* were not sexual dinosaurs but literary New Men seeking fresh grounds for masculine authority" (33). In her respectful summary of Taylor's essay, Karen O'Brien notes, "it is striking how many other (not easily placated or patronized) women saw possibilities and feminine resources in revived chivalry" (6). On the one hand, gallantry implies male condescension to women; on the other, chivalry (or gallantry purified of its insincere or seductive connotations) may inculcate respect for women in the broader culture. It is a testament to this volume that it makes room for such discussions.

An overarching question of the volume is how "Wollstonecraft's twenty-first century daughters" should realize her vision (Taylor, 48). In a historiographical conclusion, John Robertson describes Wollstonecraft philosophical dilemma. The strongest intellectual current in the Enlightenment—running through the work of Hobbes, Rousseau, Hume, and Mandeville—was an Epicurean belief in the supremacy of the passions to reason, the body to the mind. For many Epicureans, the ostensibly obvious physical superiority of men to women justified radical inequality. To counter this philosophy, "Wollstonecraft would fall back, perhaps had no alternative but to fall back, on a Christian concept of moral responsibility which elevated both reason and self-denial" (698). Many authors in this volume point out the feminist possibilities in the Platonic-Christian-Cartesian thesis that the soul has no sex.

In her obituary of Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays remarked, "Vigorous minds . . . are with difficulty restrained within the trammels of authority; a spirit of enterprise, a passion for experiment . . . urges them to quit beaten paths" (quoted in Taylor, 46). Several contemporary feminists, imbued with Wollstonecraft's "spirit of enterprise," are rethinking the position that feminism must endorse mind-body dualism. For Annette Baier and Sharon Krause, Hume's naturalist philosophy holds more promise for contemporary feminism than any two-world metaphysics. Perhaps future researchers on the Enlightenment and feminism could renovate the Scottish Enlightenment.



The books under review enrich our comprehension of the historical Enlightenment and the theoretical resources of the contemporary Enlightenment. They rediscover key thinkers, texts, ideas, and debates of the eighteenth century and introduce them to ongoing discussions about the future of the Left, social science methodology, globalization, and gender equality.

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## Ideological Projects in International Relations

*International Society and Its Critics.* Edited by Alex J. Bellamy. (Oxford University Press, 2005.)

*Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace.* By Charles Lipson. (Princeton University Press, 2005.)

*Law Without Nations? Why Constitutional Government Requires Sovereign States.* By Jeremy A. Rabkin. (Princeton University Press, 2005.)

To what extent can researchers of the political get beyond their own political, economic, and social contexts to write about world affairs? As political *scientists*, international relations (IR) scholars have generally adhered to the assumption that positivist prescriptions could solve this potential problem. But a chorus of post-positivist IR scholars have argued that such methods do not achieve their desired goals and serve instead as a scientific veneer for scholarship that is deeply committed to and reflective of particular political, economic, and social contexts. This inability may be doubly compounded, and yet all the more obvious, when the subject matter is IR, where alternative national and cultural conceptions play an unacknowledged, perhaps unconscious role in the analysis of international behavior.

Still, there is something to be said for positivism's desire to at least strive for objectivity in one's analysis of the world, even if the goal remains elusive and positivism's sanctioned methods for achieving it suspect. We might do better to accept R. W. Cox's observation that our theories are always for someone and some purpose and instead try to take seriously theories that are for somebody else. This involves being willing to step outside one's own assumptions and recognize

that they are, in fact, *assumptions* about how the world works. It also entails practicing a form of disciplinary self-reflection, or what Waever has called "perspectivism," allowing one to recognize links between world views and normative programs. Critical engagement reveals not only the normative programs of others but our own as well, which improves our scholarship about the political by preventing us from developing caricatures of analytical alternatives and by reconsidering the parameters of our own theories. Unfortunately, rather than engaging in critical self-reflection, our social scientific scholarship too often confirms that we were right to believe what we already believed, and so it serves as the justification of our particular normative programs.

The three volumes under review here raise this issue in different ways, and when read collectively they highlight how scholars of the international discuss and advance alternative normative programs. Jeremy Rabkin's *Law Without Nations?* is perhaps the most obvious in this regard. Rabkin's aim "is to explain why American constitutional traditions make it hard for the United States to embrace schemes of global governance which find so much favor in other countries, particularly in Western Europe" (16). The book draws a stark distinction between what Europeans supposedly want, which is global initiatives in issue areas such as trade, criminal justice, human rights and the environment, and what Americans supposedly want, which is to be independent of such tangling institutions. The book maps out the dangers of global, or rather "Euro-," governance as the author calls it, which assumes that global institutions that transcend nation-state sovereignty can also achieve lasting peace. What bothers Rabkin is that these institutions bind nation-states to international regulatory schemes without the legislative consent to law (41–42), and that "Americans are not accustomed to having their law made for them by free-standing international authorities" (24). Nor should they be, according to Rabkin, since his goal is "to clarify the assumptions about the world that led the American Founders to 'construct' constitutional arrangements as they did and to show why their grounding assumptions remain hard to reconcile with new 'constructions' in contemporary international politics" (17).

The crux of Rabkin's argument is the conceptual, historical link between American sovereignty and its Constitution. According to Rabkin, "inherent in the idea of sovereign authority is that it is constituted authority. That notion is already a considerable step toward the liberal idea of constitutional authority" (39). Since the kind of government that can rightly