
THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN NEW FOCUS

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Steffen Martus, *Aufklärung: Das deutsche 18. Jahrhundert: Ein Epochenbild* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2015)

T. J. Reed, *Light in Germany: Scenes from an Unknown Enlightenment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015)

Andreas Pečar and Damien Tricorne, *Falsche Freunde: War die Aufklärung wirklich die Geburtsstunde der Moderne?* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 2015)

Enlightenment scholars have had some difficulty in getting the German Enlightenment in focus. If one's conception of the Enlightenment has been shaped by reading Peter Gay and Robert Darnton, then the German Enlightenment fails to fit their model. France offers us the picture of an intelligentsia, largely located in the capital, maintaining a degree of independence with some help from patrons, and in many cases opposed to the governing regime. Whether, like Gay, one focuses on the high-profile frequenters of the Paris *salons*, or, like Darnton, on half-starved hack writers, one has something approaching the modern conception of the intellectual, and hence a flattering genealogy for present-day intellectuals. It is easy to forget that *philosophes* could also be professional administrators, like the economist Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, and that Enlightened thinking was also diffused throughout the provinces by academies and scholarly networks.¹

Germany was very different from the Gay–Darnton model. The proponents of the Enlightenment there were typically university graduates with firm institutional positions. They might be academics, employed in Germany's many universities: significantly, the German term corresponding to “republic of letters” is *Gelehrtenrepublik*, “republic of scholars.” Very often, they were professional administrators, staffing the civil service of the numerous large and small German states. Only late in the eighteenth century do we find a small number of writers

¹ See Daniel Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1978); Laurence Brockliss, *Calvet's Web: Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 2002).

living partly from their literary earnings, partly from a succession of insecure jobs. Friedrich Schiller declared in 1784, “I write as a citizen of the world who does not serve any prince.”² But he was fortunate to receive from 1791 on an annual pension from the Duke of Augustenburg. So the career paths of French *philosophes* were seldom replicated in Germany, and the German Enlightenment tended to be much more affirmative in its attitude towards society.

For a long time, histories of German culture treated the Enlightenment as a foreign body. They identified it with rationalism and French influence, limited it to a few decades in the early and mid-eighteenth century, and recorded with relief the advent of the *Sturm und Drang* in the 1770s. With Johann Gottfried Herder, the young Johann Wolfgang Goethe, J. M. R. Lenz and Johann Georg Hamann, an irrationalist movement got under way, anticipating the Romanticism which past generations saw as the quintessential expression of the German spirit. This dated narrative, clearly rooted in nineteenth-century nationalism, can be traced back specifically to Hegel’s disparaging remarks on the Berlin Enlightenment around 1800 and to Wilhelm Dilthey’s inaugural lecture in Basle (1867), “Die dichterische und philosophische Bewegung in Deutschland 1770–1800.”³ Besides its obvious anti-French motivation, this narrative has the further problem of wishing to assign a prominent place to the Weimar classicism of Goethe and Schiller, yet being unable to explain where Weimar classicism came from. Its advocates have generally appealed to a mysterious affinity supposed to exist between Germany and ancient Greece and incarnated in the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whom Goethe, in a biographical essay (1805), described as being a Greek and a pagan by temperament. But it is unfeasible to extract either an intellectual movement or a body of literature from its immediate historical context.

The year 2015 produced two books intended to inform the general educated reader about the German Enlightenment. They could hardly be more different. Steffen Martus, in almost nine hundred pages of text, offers a panorama of eighteenth-century Germany, beginning with the conveniently timed coronation of the Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg as King Frederick I at the very turn of the century. The royal party left Berlin on 17 December 1700, and the coronation took place in Königsberg, beyond the bounds of the Holy Roman Empire, on 18

² Friedrich Schiller, “Ankündigung der *Rheinischen Thalia*,” in Schiller, *Werke und Briefe*, 12 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1992–2005), vol. 8, *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. Rolf-Peter Janz (1992), 897–903, at 897.

³ See Robert E. Norton, “The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68/4 (2007), 635–58; Joachim Whaley, “‘Wahre Aufklärung kann erreicht und segensreich werden’: The German Enlightenment and Its Interpretation,” *Oxford German Studies* 44/4 (2015), 428–48.

January 1701. Its locale forms a neat link to the end point of Martus's narrative, the publication by Immanuel Kant, based in Königsberg, of his essay "A Reply to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin Monthly) in December 1784. By contrast, T. J. Reed's much shorter and punchier text concentrates on the last third of the eighteenth century, and on the writers associated with the "classical age" of German literature: Goethe, Schiller, and Kant, flanked by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Georg Forster, and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. Although both are first and foremost literary scholars, Martus displays a broad picture of culture and society. Literature receives, on the whole, less attention than one might expect; the work of art discussed in most detail is Giambattista Tiepolo's ceiling frescoes in the Residenz at Würzburg. Reed has a smaller range, but there is nothing narrow about his book: Kant, Goethe, and the rest raise the most portentous ethical and political questions for a society struggling towards modernity.

Any attempt to compare two such different books in detail would do each an injustice by obscuring its distinctive qualities. So I will discuss them separately and finally consider a provocative recent essay by Andreas Pečar and Damien Tricoire, which, though not specifically about Germany, deserves the attention of anyone concerned with the Enlightenment.

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Of the distinctive features of Martus's book, the most immediately obvious is its length. Combining a chronological with a thematic approach, Martus divides the German Enlightenment into four phases. The first phase, 1680–1726, focusing on Berlin, Leipzig and Hamburg, is followed by another, 1721–40, in which the Enlightenment, under the auspices of Johann Christoph Gottsched and his wife Luise, née Kulmus, properly takes off. The third phase, 1740–63, is framed by the two wars started by Frederick the Great, the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War, and includes the development of a jocular sociability, expressed in Anacreontic verse, and of sensibility or *Empfindsamkeit*. Finally, the 1763–84 period, beginning with Winckelmann's history of classical art which made Greek antiquity available in a new way, leads via pathbreaking medical explorations of physiology and psychology to Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?", which figures as a kind of swan song for the Enlightenment.

While the structure of the book does not lend itself to summary in narrative form, it certainly captures a shift from rationalism to sensibility which any student of the period must notice and which exposes the inadequacy of such old-fashioned clichés as "the age of reason." Within this framework, Martus shows considerable skill in accommodating a large number of essential topics, without giving any sense that he is cramming them in from a desire for encyclopedic completeness.

Transitions are for the most part skilfully managed: thus in chapter 3 we move from the governance of Hamburg to an explanation of its position as a self-governing imperial city and thence to an account of the Holy Roman Empire of which it was part. Just occasionally the joints creak, but on the whole Martus has successfully achieved a feat of thematic and narrative integration which must have been considerably harder than it looks.

Within this overall structure, the strengths of Martus's book include its emphasis on institutions. Dealing with the princely court, he valuably reminds us how diverse such institutions were. Few tried to emulate Versailles, and Norbert Elias's analysis of court society cannot easily be transferred to Germany. Some courts strove for elegance, like that of Saxony, but others, like that of Prussia under Frederick William I, aimed at simplicity and parsimony. Others again, especially that of Weimar, upheld the ideal of the *Musenhof*, investing in cultural capital: the Duchess Anna Amalia summoned the great Enlightenment author Christoph Martin Wieland to Weimar as tutor to her sons in 1772, several years before her elder son invited Goethe, who had shot to fame with the drama *Götz von Berlichingen* and the novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, to become his companion. Most courts relied on the services of trained administrators who had often studied the new science of cameralism (*Cameralwissenschaft*) and who sought, with the best intentions, to regulate the lives of subjects through a comprehensive *Policey*, extending from domestic morals to town planning. Here again Martus is judicious. Earlier studies of *Policey* invited us to shudder at the control that administrators assumed over people's lives.⁴ Martus is much more sceptical, plausibly surmising that the cameralists' mania for issuing and reissuing regulations shows that the regulations were only patchily observed, and pointing out that a major function of such regulations was to advertise the presence of the prince. Although he is impressively up to date with historical literature, mainly in German, Martus seems not to know Andre Wakefield's argument, based on immense archival research, that cameralists, even the famous Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi, were often incompetent and sometimes less than honest.⁵

Another striking emphasis is on the media. Martus is not much interested in Jürgen Habermas's now rather threadbare theory of the emerging public sphere (Habermas features in the bibliography, but not in the text), but rather in recent studies of media and communications, and how they can be applied to the eighteenth century. It is in this light that he considers the expansion of moral weeklies and the publishing industry, telling us at some length, for example,

⁴ Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600–1800* (New Haven, 1983).

⁵ Andre Wakefield, *The Disordered Police State: German Cameralism as Science and Practice* (Chicago, 2009).

about Johann Heinrich Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* (1732–51) as a business venture. Clearly this approach is indebted to Darnton's study of the *Encyclopédie*.⁶ When he comes to the Lisbon earthquake, Martus treats it not only as a problem for theodicy but also as a media event.⁷ In fact it was more the latter, for, as Martus shows, the flood of pamphlets and sermons generated by the catastrophe rarely treated it, like Voltaire and (in retrospect) Goethe, as a shocking break with Enlightenment optimism.⁸ One medical author, discussed here, argued that God had actually confirmed his benevolence by the restraint with which he had annihilated a mere thirty thousand people, especially since far more had perished over the years at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition or Alba's troops in the Netherlands.⁹

Martus's abundant elbow room enables him to bring into play a variety of perspectives. This is particularly apparent in his chapter on the Seven Years War. Frederick II started it in 1756 in order to forestall a combined attack by France, Austria and Russia which he expected in the following year. He mobilized not only his troops but also the media. A wave of patriotic literature, especially the bloodthirsty *Kriegslieder* by Johann Ludwig Gleim, prepared the way for the nationalistic fury with which Prussians, some fifty years later, would respond to Napoleon's invasion. At the same time, Frederick's army was full of press-ganged soldiers who were motivated not by patriotism but by savage discipline. Martus quotes from the worm's-eye view of the battle of Lobositz given by Ulrich Bräker, who deserted the moment he could. Saxon prisoners of war were even forced to serve in the Prussian Army. Preachers obliged to defend the war, meanwhile, found the discourse of "love of the fatherland" a convenient way of avoiding difficult theological issues and addressing audiences whose individual views might well be diverse and incompatible. Presenting these events from a variety of perspectives, Martus shows how the emotional language of sensibility was transmuted into the discourse of patriotism. The reader who thinks forward

⁶ Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the "Encyclopédie", 1775–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

⁷ Cf. the similar approach by Christiane Eifert, "Das Erdbeben von Lissabon 1755: Zur Historizität einer Naturkatastrophe," *Historische Zeitschrift* 274/3 (2002), 633–64, esp. 649–61.

⁸ Martus follows the careful historical approach taken by Gerhard Lauer and Thorsten Unger in the editorial introduction to their collection of research papers, *Das Erdbeben von Lissabon und der Katastrophendiskurs im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2008), a book that is not as well known outside Germany as it deserves to be.

⁹ Johann Gottlob Krüger, *Gedanken von den Ursachen des Erdbebens, nebst einer moralischen Betrachtung* (Halle, 1756), partially reprinted in Wolfgang Breidert, ed., *Die Erschütterung der vollkommenen Welt: Die Wirkung des Erdbebens von Lissabon im Spiegel europäischer Zeitgenossen* (Darmstadt, 1994), 25–50, esp. 50.

beyond the book's chronological limits is thus helped to understand how the Enlightenment paved the way for the emergence of its own antithesis in the later xenophobic nationalism of the struggle against Napoleon.

One might, however, ask what reasons there are, other than chronological, for including the Seven Years War in an account of the Enlightenment. Was it not a supreme example of the cynical power politics which the Enlighteners abhorred? Martus offers two reasons for giving it a prominent place. First, it was by its very nature a challenge to Enlightenment visions of order. Its instigator, Frederick II, was the first to admit the uncertain, incalculable character of war. He was saved from utter defeat by two unforeseeable events: the failure of Austrian and Russian troops to advance on Berlin in 1759, and the death of Tsarina Elisabeth I in 1762, which took Russia out of the war. Second, the war was not only a military but a media event, in which, as a contemporary noted, monarchs issued many manifestos to defend their actions. Thus it illustrates the general expansion of the media which is a leitmotif of Martus's account.

Martus's chapter on the Seven Years War also exemplifies his reluctance to offer a teleological account of the Enlightenment. It would be hard to give any narrative summary of his book. Rather, one can extract from it several possible narratives. Alongside the expansion of the media, the later pages have much to say about "the individualization of the Enlightenment." By this Martus means the investigation of the self, the inquiries by "philosophical physicians" into the relation of the mind and the body, the increased understanding of the psychology of the criminal shown in the reception of Cesare Beccaria's proposals for legal reform, the empirical psychology of Karl Philipp Moritz, and Moritz's portrayal of the troubled self in his autobiographical novel *Anton Reiser*. Here several ironic reversals occur. The complexity and diversity of individual experience make it difficult to set up general laws, whether in criminology or in psychology. And semi-fictional cases of damaged individuals, such as Goethe's Werther and Moritz's Reiser, undermined Kant's famous demand, in "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?"; that one should shake off one's blameworthy immaturity and become *mündig* (come of age). Can one demand *Mündigkeit* of such people? If anything, Martus offers an ironic narrative of the Enlightenment as a movement which undermines and negates itself in the moment of its success.

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T.J. Reed's *Light in Germany* is a complete contrast.¹⁰ If Martus's method is pictorial, taking us from one scene of eighteenth-century Germany to another,

¹⁰ This is an expanded version of a shorter book addressed to a German readership: T. J. Reed, *Mehr Licht in Deutschland: Kleine Geschichte der Aufklärung* (Munich, 2009).

Reed's approach is dynamic. For him the Enlightenment is very much a narrative, embedded in a longer history of progress. It has antecedents in the Renaissance (Michel de Montaigne is a favourite reference point) and the Protestant Reformation, though that, the author observes, soon hardened into dogmatism. Those less enthusiastic about progress are chided for dragging their feet (I noticed this image three times, at 27, 101 and 123). Herder's survey of different civilizations is found wanting because its cultural relativism offers progression, but not progress. Although a lifetime's learning has gone into the book, this is not only a historical account, but also a work of argument and advocacy. In that, it resembles the books on the Enlightenment as an ongoing project by the Berlin-based philosopher Susan Neiman.¹¹ Like Neiman's work, too, it is inspiring and impassioned. It is written with an intensity that is compelling, but also exhausting: the reader might be well advised to go for a walk between chapters.

The exemplary progressive authors are Kant and Schiller. Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" is described in the opening chapter as the "primal scene" of Enlightenment. Kant's image of maturity (*Mündigkeit*) signifies a transition not only in the life of the individual, but also in history. It invites us, collectively, to shake off our subjection to authority, to challenge it, and to start thinking for ourselves. Rather than take Kant's essay as a timeless intellectual manifesto, however, Reed is careful to place it in the historical circumstances of Frederick II's Prussia, and to explain what Kant meant by the public use of reason. It did not mean that intellectual discussion was entirely separate from practice: officials, such as those who debated in the Berlin Wednesday Society, could also suggest constructive improvements to the institutions they administered. And after all, though the Wednesday Society was semisecret, papers presented to the society were made public in its journal, the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*.

There follows a remarkable chapter on Kant. Reed argues that Kant is emphatically not an ivory-tower philosopher. He intended his philosophy to be useful, to address substantive issues that confront everyone in the real world. Reed fully acknowledges the difficulty of reading Kant, but urges us to get beyond the often rebarbative terminology and to take guidance from the metaphors, especially those of voyaging and building, that not only express but shape Kant's thought. This is not a thumbnail guide to Kant's ideas, but an explanation of Kant's way of philosophizing. It can be warmly recommended to anyone who is hesitating on the brink of the Critiques.

Schiller is introduced by the story of his youthful—and justified—rebellion against the oppression of Duke Karl Eugen of Württemberg, who gave bright boys

¹¹ See Susan Neiman, *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists* (London, 2009); Neiman, *Why Grow Up? Subversive Thoughts for an Infantile Age*, rev. edn (London, 2016).

an education—in Schiller’s case, a remarkably good one—in order to employ them for a pittance in his administration or his army. It is not surprising that when Schiller took up history writing his main theme should be the struggle for freedom, illustrated especially from the revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish oppression. Noting indignantly that German historians, even today, refuse to accept Schiller as a member of their profession, Reed inveighs against the tradition, associated especially with Leopold von Ranke and reinforced by G. W. F. Hegel, which saw it as the historian’s task to celebrate German and particularly Prussian nationalism. This is vigorous, barnstorming polemic, but it makes a strong and serious case.

It is not quite so easy to fit Goethe into Reed’s conception of the Enlightenment. There is a significant omission in the chapter entitled “Talking to Tyrants,” which deals with the wish, expressed by many Enlightenment writers, of serving as adviser to a prince and exercising a good influence on his administration. Certainly the princes of eighteenth-century Germany, dismissed here (apart from Frederick II, and with the distinguished exception of Joseph II of Austria) as irresponsible and unenlightened spendthrifts, could have done with such advisers. The chapter considers various fictional scenarios: the conversations between Posa and Philip II of Spain in Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, between Iphigenie and Thoas in Goethe’s *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, and between Nathan and Saladin in Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*. It makes the fine point that while Schiller puts into Posa’s mouth various opinions which are anachronistic for the sixteenth century, from Schiller’s eighteenth-century viewpoint it is Philip, the absolute ruler, who is the anachronism. But this chapter fails to consider that Goethe really was an adviser to a ruler, Duke Karl August of Weimar, and that although he managed to rein in the duke’s extravagance, his influence on social policy was decidedly illiberal.¹²

Goethe plays a starring role, however, when Reed comes to consider the Enlightenment’s view of religion. Refreshingly, he places the emphasis not on polemics against Christianity, which many German intellectuals thought barely worth attacking, but on the positive proposal of a new humanist outlook grounded on a sense of humanity’s potential. The key texts here are Goethe’s poem “Das Göttliche” (The Divine) and the humanism of *Iphigenie*. Goethe is further presented, with abundant textual justification, as someone who enjoyed and celebrated earthly life, and had no time for the other-worldly fantasies offered by his religious friends such as Johann Caspar Lavater. This in turn leads into a striking chapter, “The Full Earth: A Lyrical Enlightenment,” which considers

¹² See W. Daniel Wilson, *Das Goethe-Tabu: Protest und Menschenrechte im klassischen Weimar* (Munich, 1999); Wilson, “Goethe, His Duke and Infanticide: New Documents and Reflections on a Controversial Execution,” *German Life and Letters* 61/1 (2008), 7–32.

Goethe's poetry and his appreciation of Italy in the *Italian Journey*. We are given one of Goethe's lesser-known poems, the last of the series *Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten* (Chinese-German Days and Seasons), in the original with a translation. This chapter presents, with a measured and hence all the more infectious enthusiasm, a crucial part both of Goethe's creative achievement and of what may be thought his message for humanity.

This *Diessseitigkeit* extends also into the chapter on science. Here much is made of Goethe's colour theory and his attack on Isaac Newton (considered a praiseworthy example of Enlightenment disrespect for authority). The trouble here is that Goethe's rejection of the Newtonian prism is generally agreed to have been mistaken, and was followed in his time by hardly anyone except the young Arthur Schopenhauer; a reference to J. M. W. Turner greatly exaggerates the latter's interest in it.¹³ In this section, as often in discussions of Goethe's science, there is, to my mind, much special pleading.¹⁴ On the other hand, Reed offers a much-needed appreciation of Kant as a theoretical scientist. Kant's first published work, *General History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), sketches a compelling picture of the physical universe in the tradition of physico-theology, though the theology could be omitted and the picture would be just as convincing. Kant was even the first person to suggest that the nebulae visible beyond the Milky Way might be separate galaxies.

The achievement of this book is to place the classical age of German literature fairly and squarely in the Enlightenment. That seems to me a justified and welcome move. Future histories of the Enlightenment will need to accommodate it, and Paris-centred accounts will look even more inadequate. But there remains much that is controversial. Goethe's *Faust* receives a single paragraph in which it is dismissed as "the most grandiose mistake in literary history" because it tries to adapt a Christian narrative for new purposes. Certainly it is good to see that in Reed's eyes Goethe can err, but it would take a long argument to show why this judgment, in my belief, is deeply mistaken. Sometimes brevity leads to oversimplification. Schiller's early drama of revolt, here called *The Brigands* (though the title *Die Räuber* is usually translated as *The Robbers*), certainly ends with the hero, Karl Moor, submitting to God in a state of "childish helplessness." But Reed's summary says nothing about his villainous brother Franz Moor, who adopts the materialism of the radical French Enlightenment, and whose

¹³ See John Gage, "Turner's Annotated Books: Goethe's Theory of Colours," *Turner Studies* 4/2 (1984), 34–52.

¹⁴ I have given my own, more sceptical view of Goethe's science in *Goethe: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2016); cf. H. B. Nisbet, *Goethe and the Scientific Tradition* (London, 1972). Reed does not cite the argument by Schöne that Goethe's campaign against Newton was essentially religious: see Albrecht Schöne, *Goethes Farbentheologie* (Munich, 1987).

philosophy Schiller described as the “Resultat eines aufgeklärten Denkens” (the result of enlightened thinking).¹⁵

The emphasis on the late Enlightenment, in extreme contrast to Martus, is open to question. One cannot tell where the German Enlightenment came from. Christian Thomasius is quoted as anticipating Kant’s demand for critical reasoning, but otherwise one has the impression that little or nothing happened before Lessing. It is curious to find a book on the German Enlightenment in which Gottsched is not mentioned at all, and where the philosopher Christian Wolff and the poet and scientist Albrecht von Haller are mentioned only occasionally. However, aside from Reed’s understandable wish to focus on writers of the first rank, it is arguable that Gottsched and the others are now only of historical interest, whereas Goethe, Kant and Schiller are or should be living presences.

In a historical perspective, the central place given to Kant is also questionable. Certainly, many intellectual historians treat Kant as the philosophical high point of the Enlightenment. Now there are several texts by Kant that develop Enlightenment themes in new, radical, and exciting ways. The confidence in progress expressed famously by Turgot, Nicolas de Condorcet and others, and which has often served later generations as an excuse to deride the Enlightenment, is placed on a convincing and realistic philosophical basis in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent.” Doubts about the theodicy affirmed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz are given an unanswerable formulation in “On the Failure of all Attempts at Theodicy.” Examples could be multiplied.

On the other hand, some of Kant’s leading ideas are orthogonal to the Enlightenment. If any theme dominates the late Enlightenment, especially in Germany, it is the conception of the human being as a whole, uniting body and mind, and the attempt to explain the *commercium mentis et corporis*. A large quantity of medical and psychological writing culminates in Schiller’s attempt to imagine the overcoming of self-division through aesthetic experience in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). Kant, however, sees the human being as divided. The noumenal self, where reason and morality are located, is distinct from the phenomenal self, the embodied person. Reason and morality combine to establish our good will, which must often override the desires of the empirical self. Indeed an action is only morally good insofar as it conflicts with one’s desires. If one’s moral duty complies with one’s desires or one’s interests, one is not really fulfilling a duty. Dennis Rasmussen has recently noted in how many ways Kant’s outlook consciously departs from leading strands of eighteenth-century thought, mentioning, among other things, “his radical separation of the phenomenal world (perceived by the senses) and the noumenal world (accessible

¹⁵ Friedrich Schiller, “Selbstrezension,” in Schiller, *Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, *Dramen I*, ed. Gerhard Kluge (1988), 293–311, at 302.

by pure reason); his understanding of freedom in terms obeying a self-prescribed law out of pure respect for the universality of the law itself, regardless of the consequences; his hypothetical contractarianism and insistence on unconditional obedience to the established authorities.”¹⁶ One could instance also his extremely restrictive views on the morality of sexual behaviour, including his bizarre claim that masturbation is worse than suicide.¹⁷

The story even of the German Enlightenment could therefore be told differently, indeed in a number of different ways. However, Reed’s version deserves wide currency. He defends the Enlightenment vigorously and convincingly against such detractors as Max Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, and he notes the continuation of its ideals, against heavy odds, in the fictional and journalistic work of Thomas Mann, and in the official values of present-day Germany, which—even more since Reed’s book was published—has emerged as the Western country most dedicated to upholding the liberal ideals associated with the Enlightenment.

In stressing the present-day relevance of Enlightenment ideals, Reed joins several recent writers, notably Jonathan Israel and Anthony Pagden.¹⁸ The case for doing so, it might be thought, grows stronger by the week. But there is also the view that to insist on the Enlightenment’s value for us means getting the Enlightenment wrong, and that the advanced thinkers of the eighteenth century were far from being the ancestors of present-day liberals.

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This is the argument put forward by Andreas Pečar and Damien Tricorne in a well-written, provocative and polemical book, based on excellent knowledge both of primary Enlightenment texts and of modern, including very recent, scholarship in several languages. They adopt the ingenious rhetorical device of quoting at intervals from Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s best-selling utopia, *L’an 2400*, and making us wonder whether we would really like to live in Mercier’s future in which Enlightenment ideals have been realized and all unenlightened books have been solemnly burnt. Rhetoric aside, Pečar and Tricorne have two theses worth engaging with. One is that the goals of the Enlightenment were very different

¹⁶ Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Pragmatic Enlightenment: Recovering the Liberalism of Hume, Smith, Montesquieu, and Voltaire* (Cambridge, 2014), 15 n.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (1798), in Kant, *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 6 vols. (Darmstadt, 1958), vol. 4, 556–9. Cf. the comments on Kant’s sexual morality in Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 299–313.

¹⁸ See Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), and its sequels; Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (Oxford, 2013).

from those of modern liberals. The other is that to understand Enlightenment texts accurately, one has to re-place them in their historical context.

The first thesis is explicitly aimed against Jonathan Israel's claim that his radical Enlightenment led to the modern ideals of democracy, racial and gender equality, intellectual freedom, and the separation of church and state. Here Pečar and Tricorne make several valid points. The classic Enlightenment offers no support for modern feminism (though no one who has read Denis Diderot's "Sur les femmes," or the chapter on the noneducation of Sophie in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile*, needs to be told this). The classical republicanism which was a prominent Enlightenment ideal, explored especially in John Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975), was quite different from modern liberal individualism. The citizen was expected to be actively involved in public life and prepared to take up arms on the republic's behalf. Such active citizenship was not expected of women. The republican ideal was also compatible with slavery, as in ancient Athens and Rome. The movement for the abolition of slavery did not originate with the Enlightenment, but with the Evangelical revival. The law of nations, according to Hugo Grotius, permitted slavery, and according to Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, in *De l'esprit des lois*, slavery was natural in the hot climates where despotism flourished. When the Enlightenment advocated tolerance, it did not mean the modern ideal of tolerance based on respect for other religions, but considered all other religions inferior to a religion of reason which it hoped would displace them. The radical wing of the Enlightenment was no more tolerant; it thought that even the religion of reason ought to be superseded by atheism.

These claims are broadly right and make salutary reading. Two remaining chapters are more distinctive. The authors address the Enlightenment's less than satisfactory attitudes to race. They refrain from quoting the much-discussed passages from Kant and David Hume which are undoubtedly racist but, contrary to what is sometimes extravagantly claimed, have no bearing on either's philosophy as a whole.¹⁹ They avoid making the Enlightenment an ancestor of twentieth-century racism. They do so because the racism found in the Enlightenment is a hangover from older, biblical and Leibnizian conceptions of a hierarchy of created beings, which implies a hierarchy among different types of humanity. So the reputation of the Enlightenment is to some degree salvaged,

¹⁹ David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), 629–30; Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, in Kant, *Werke*, 1: 821–84, at 880, 882. For an example of the unwarrantedly broad conclusions that have been drawn from these passages, see Richard Popkin, "The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism," in Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Indianapolis, 1993), 79–102.

but at the cost of showing how inadequately enlightened it was. This is at least a fresh take on an overfamiliar topic.

Another chapter appears to court paradox by claiming that the *Histoire des deux Indes*, compiled by Guillaume-Thomas Raynal with substantial help from Diderot and others, does not deserve its reputation as the anticolonial bible.²⁰ It is not really anticolonial, but only directed against the colonization projects by nations other than France. It advises the French how to avoid mistakes made by others and how to establish a foothold in Madagascar and elsewhere by means of trade and “soft power.” While I don’t think this is a plausible reading of the *Histoire* as a whole—the book has 4,353 pages, though I confess to not having read every single one—it should make us look afresh at some passages.

Pečar and Tricorne, however—and this is their second thesis—claim that we are bound to misunderstand the *Histoire*, and any other text, if we disregard the context in which it was originally written. To the historically minded scholar, that seems a truism. But by “context” Pečar and Tricorne mean something narrower, namely the purpose for which the author originally wrote the book.²¹ They remind us that Raynal enjoyed the patronage of Madame de Pompadour, who supported the ministers, Choiseul and his cousin Choiseul-Praslin, who directed French colonial policy. Raynal was therefore encouraged to write the *Histoire* in order to defend the new project of colonizing Madagascar. This must be an inadequate explanation, since the book is hugely disproportionate to any such purpose.

But the real fault in this thesis is one of method. It implies that you move from the text to its genesis. Having reconstructed its genesis with the aid of archival materials, you return to the text, but attend only to those aspects that fit your theory of its genesis. That is one version of the genetic fallacy. Another version, also apparent here, consists in forgetting that a valuable text outlives the occasion that gave rise to it and reveals implications that would not be visible in a merely genetic account. Even if the *Histoire* originated as a stroke in a French propaganda war, its value as an Enlightenment masterpiece (I fully concur with the evaluation by Israel and others) transcends its origins.

Another example takes us back to Kant. Near the end of their book, Pečar and Tricorne briefly read “What Is Enlightenment?,” along with some other texts by

²⁰ See, especially, the study of the *Histoire* by Jonathan Israel in *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (Oxford, 2011), 413–42, cited by Pečar and Tricorne at 129.

²¹ More recently Pečar has taken a similar approach to the philosophical essays by Frederick the Great, arguing that they should be read primarily as exercises in self-presentation: Andreas Pečar, *Die Masken des Königs: Friedrich II. von Preußen als Schriftsteller* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016).

Kant, as a move in academic politics, intended to assert the primacy of philosophy over theology. Similarly, Martus, linking the beginning of his book, Frederick I's coronation in Königsberg, with its end, calls Kant's essay a self-coronation, a bid for intellectual authority. These claims may well be true, but so what? The value of Kant's text as a summons to intellectual independence transcends his motives for writing and publishing it.

Falsche Freunde is a lively and challenging essay. Enlightenment scholars ought to read it, take it seriously, and modify some of their views. It should certainly make us all more cautious about appealing to "Enlightenment values" when faced with the disturbing political developments of the present day. We should ask ourselves "which Enlightenment values?" and return to the key texts of the Enlightenment perhaps more critically.

* * *

Looking back at the books by Martus and Reed in the light of *Falsche Freunde*, the differences between them become even more apparent. Martus concedes, when discussing Israel's concept of "radical Enlightenment," that the Enlightenment can be understood as a narrative of modernization. For him, that is *a* story, albeit an attractive one, whereas for both Israel and Reed the narrative of progress is *the* story. In Martus's view, the Enlightenment presents us not with an earlier stage in a grand narrative that includes ourselves, but with a set of potentially instructive analogies to the present. The prominence of religion at the present day, for example, should prompt us not to look in the Enlightenment for evidence of secularization, but to consider how the Enlightenment coped with confessional conflicts while maintaining a positive attitude towards religion. Martus's approach presupposes the objectivity which has been the official doctrine of the historical profession ever since it constituted itself as an academic discipline in the age of Ranke. But historians have not always been as objective as they claim. I have already mentioned Reed's charge that Ranke and his successors placed history in the service of the Prussian state. It seems to me that it is perfectly proper for historians to write history in the spirit of their own values, provided they are open with the reader about what those values are; that, in a now famous phrase, "objectivity is not neutrality";²² and that the historian, who is professionally committed not only to research but also to writing, must deal practically with questions of rhetoric, tact, and communication with the reader. The reader must be treated with respect and assumed to be, in Kant's word, *mündig* (mature), with no need or desire for sermons or moral truisms.

²² This phrase owes its fame to Thomas L. Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore, 1998).

That is primarily a *literary* requirement, requiring skillful management of the authorial voice. If that condition is met, I for one prefer the explicitly value-laden approach of Reed and Israel—not just, I think, because I share many of their values, but also because they invite productive argument.

The downside of the explicitly value-laden approach to the Enlightenment is that it can tempt one to simplify one's subject matter. Any account of the Enlightenment must accommodate contradictions. For example, since we no longer think of the Enlightenment as the "age of reason," we have to give due prominence to the growth of "sensibility," the high value placed on emotion and sympathy, from at least the mid-century onwards, with important antecedents in the philosophy of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, and the "moral sense" school of philosophers. Martus does so, and accommodates in his portrayal the emotional poetry of the group known as the Göttinger Hain in the early 1770s. Yet these young men were also hostile to what they considered the indecency of the *philosophes* and of French-influenced German writers such as Wieland. At a dinner, the *Hainbündler* drank a toast: "Death to Wieland, the corrupter of morals! Death to Voltaire!"²³ Such episodes have somehow to be accommodated within a history of the Enlightenment, without making "Enlightenment" a mere synonym for "everything that happened in the eighteenth century."

Even within canonical Enlightenment texts we can find contradictions, including some inserted by the authors. Thus the *Histoire des deux Indes* includes a eulogy by Raynal of the Chinese, who were widely idealized as a highly civilized nation governed by philosophers, and also a reply by Diderot, who found in European accounts of China ample evidence of tyranny, cruelty, and corruption.²⁴ Here the compilers of the *Histoire* present the mature reader with an internal argument, inviting us to decide for ourselves. More generally, the Enlightenment can be seen as a prolonged series of arguments (an approach taken by both Reed and Israel), but one would have to acknowledge, more than is sometimes done in polemical accounts, that people can argue and still, within a larger conflict, be on the same side.

²³ See Hans-Jürgen Schrader, "Mit Feuer, Schwert und schlechtem Gewissen: Zum Kreuzzug der Hainbündler gegen Wieland," *Euphorion* 78/3 (1984), 325–67.

²⁴ Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 3rd edn, 10 vols. (Geneva, 1781), 1: 181–224. The chapter criticizing China is among the passages identified as Diderot's in Denis Diderot, "Extraits de l'*Histoire des deux Indes*," in Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Lewinter, 15 vols. (Paris, 1969–73), 15: 399–580.