The Historical Journal, 52, 3 (2009), pp. 717–738 © Cambridge University Press 2009
doi:10.1017/S0018246X09990094 Printed in the United Kingdom

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

A NEW INTELLECTUAL HISTORY? JONATHAN ISRAEL'S ENLIGHTENMENT

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ABSTRACT. *This review points out the dangers of taking Jonathan Israel's volumes on the Enlightenment as a new framework for Enlightenment studies. Despite Israel's claim in* Enlightenment contested *to have historicized our understanding of the Enlightenment, his modus operandi is fundamentally unhistorical, and the result is a presentist interpretation with an oversimplified classification of thinkers into 'radical' and 'moderate' camps. The review suggests more effective ways to make a truly historicized Enlightenment present for us now, especially by devoting more attention to the literary and rhetorical properties of Enlightenment texts.*

With *Radical Enlightenment* and *Enlightenment contested* Jonathan Israel has produced roughly two-thirds of what will be the most ambitious and sweeping revisionist history of the Enlightenment since Ernst Cassirer's *The philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932).[1] In the scale of its research Israel's work dwarfs Cassirer's volume. It makes the other contender, Peter Gay's two-volume *The Enlightenment: an interpretation* (1966–9), seem a fairly modest accomplishment.[2] It is a feat of historical recovery, bringing to centre stage radical voices that remain relatively neglected despite their having given the western liberal tradition some of its staunchest arguments for a fully secular vision of modernity. But this is a feat that harbours a serious threat, an apparent triumph of historical empiricism that could derail efforts to achieve an historical understanding of the Enlightenment for our own needs in our own times. At least in retrospect, we can see the threat coming in the first volume; in the second – the subject of this review – it is writ large.[3]

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[1] Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001); idem, *Enlightenment contested: philosophy, modernity, and the emancipation of man* (Oxford, 2006). References in parentheses are to *Enlightenment contested*.

[2] Ernst Cassirer, *The philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ, 1951); Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation* (2 vols., New York, NY, 1966–9).

[3] Though I cannot claim prescience, I did raise some of the issues discussed here in my review of *Radical Enlightenment* in the *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), pp. 389–93.

Readers who have worked through *Radical Enlightenment* will find Israel's second volume often quite predictable, and in places repetitious, but far from superfluous. In *Enlightenment contested* Israel carries his remapping of the terrain from the late seventeenth century, the focus of the first volume, to the early 1750s. He continues to press for and document a third way, rejecting both recent attempts to parcel the Enlightenment into nationally distinct movements and approaches to it as a unitary whole. He sees two Enlightenments, often in conflict and fundamentally irreconcilable. His 'moderate' Enlightenment was an intellectually expedient and incoherent attempt to reconcile reason with faith, science and philosophy with theology, and emancipatory concepts of human nature with traditional social hierarchies and forms of political authority. To Israel the fact that the moderate 'camp' still receives the lion's share of attention in intellectual histories of the Enlightenment is a measure of modern democratic liberalism's disconnection from its true origins. Until we reconnect with the 'abstract body of basic values' developed by the 'radical' Enlightenment, whose pivotal figures were Spinoza, Bayle, and Diderot, we will not effectively reassert the uncompromisingly secular, liberal, egalitarian, and democratic programme for human emancipation that to some extent already constitutes 'modernity' and should be its intellectual core. Given the threats to this programme in our own era, a basic reorientation of Enlightenment studies – one centred on recovering the radical legacy in its historical integrity, but with a new awareness of its unique cogency and relevance – is overdue. Like *Radical Enlightenment*, *Enlightenment contested* is designed to begin the recovery on a monumental scale, with a cast of well-known and more or less obscure radicals active between 1660 and 1750. Israel numbers them at over seventy (p. 867).

Nothing surprising so far. Where the volume acquires its own *raison d'être* and its strongest claim to originality is in Israel's account of the shift in the radical Enlightenment's geographical 'centre of gravity' in the first half of the eighteenth century. The revisionist argument of the first volume makes the Dutch Republic, with its extraordinary mix of native Dutch, Jewish, and Protestant diasporic communities, the centre of gravity for the radical thought of the Early Enlightenment. France and England have bit parts in this genealogy. Readers who were pleased to see the French (as well as the English) put in their place are likely to find the denouement of this volume's plot disconcerting. By the 1740s the moderate Enlightenment has triumphed in the United Provinces. The radical Enlightenment is nearly defunct there, though Dutch radicals continue to exercise a crucial influence in France. France becomes the new epicentre of radical thought. Faced with an increasingly militant counter-enlightenment in controversies about Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois* and the early volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, moderates and radicals in France enter an alliance of necessity in which the radicals, now given the opportunity to demonstrate the greater coherence of their vision, become 'the dominant partner' (p. 862). In this development La Mettrie's amoral and libertine atheism, exhibited in his life as well as his thought, proves quite handy. It offers Diderot and others a foil to their

claim that their own materialist atheism is profoundly ethical, and indeed that it is uniquely rigorous as an ethical system precisely because it is wholly secular.

When we come at the causes of the French Revolution through this re-examination of the 1740s and early 1750s in France, Israel forecasts with an eye to the next volume, we understand just how 'philosophical' they were. He sets this claim within an exploration of the middle phase of the Enlightenment, roughly in the first half of the eighteenth century, that is unparalleled in the depth and breadth of its research and in the inclusiveness of its grand narrative. Specialists in Enlightenment studies are likely to learn quite a lot about many of the thinkers and texts Israel includes on both the moderate and radical sides; and they may encounter some of these for the first time. Even as he advances to his mid-century French plot, Israel traces processes of intellectual exchange and reception across multiple national boundaries and gives new attention to geographical areas that have conventionally been kept on the margins of Enlightenment narratives. His discussions of the reception of Enlightenment ideas in Greece and Russia are striking cases in point. As a Germanist I was delighted to find the German Early Enlightenment given detailed treatment, with an impressive contextualization centred on the universities. Israel's prose is, to be sure, often lugubrious, and that makes the reading of this volume more laborious than it need be. Nonetheless, though, the well-paced narrative and salient detail in his account of the three culminating moments – the controversies over *L'esprit des lois*, the *Encyclopédie*, and La Mettrie – makes the fourth and final part something like a page turner.

It is no small achievement, I should add, to keep an overarching argument clearly in view in a volume of such massive girth and thick detail. And so I raise the following objections with some regret. The volume is not what its author wants it to be. What undermines Israel's purpose is his use of a naïve, superficial, and rigid philosophical yardstick to measure the rational coherence of texts and to explain their historical agency, and to draw unwarranted inferences about their contents. This modus operandi is not simply incompatible with his ambition to provide 'a usable outline survey and work of reference' for scholars, students, and general readers; it grounds his entire project in an unhistorical procedure. The result is an exercise in presentism substituting for historical understanding, and an alarming one. If it were to be taken as the guidebook for a major new departure in Enlightenment studies, the field would be more impoverished than enriched.

I am not faulting Israel for failing to practise a completely neutral objectivity that we all know to be unattainable. In his contentious pursuit of an ideological agenda in the strong sense – an agenda of interlocking political beliefs – Israel acts entirely within his remit as an historian. Ideological commitments need not prevent us from striving for as much objectivity as can reasonably be expected, and when the task at hand is to remove the no less ideological blinders imposed by conventional wisdom, the commitments may have to be stated tendentiously.[4]

[4] Particularly important on this subject is Thomas L. Haskell, 'Objectivity is not neutrality: rhetoric versus practice in Peter Novick's *That noble dream*', in idem, *Objectivity is not neutrality: explanatory schemes in*

Israel's agenda is, in fact, to be welcomed. It rests on a legitimate and timely question: how historical research can make the intellectual content of the Enlightenment effectively present and useable for us now.[5] Two perceptions make that question so pressing for Israel. The first is that in recent decades the West has been beset by a new wave of limitless epistemological and moral relativism that threatens to drown the Enlightenment's indispensable legacy. The second perception is political. In tracing its origins to the Enlightenment, secular and democratic liberalism has been blindly enamoured of prominent 'moderate' figures of the Enlightenment, and particularly of the English moderate strain represented by Locke and Hume. As it has lost sight of its real roots in radical thought, it has weakened its capacity to assert itself in the face of counter-enlightenment forces that have gathered strength from several directions. Hence Israel's insistence that we apply a strong dose of critical scrutiny to topple Locke and Hume from their perches, particularly in Anglophone scholarship, and that we devote far more effort to grasping the full import of the French radical thought that culminated in Diderot's turn in the mid-1740s from Lockean and Newtonian conventional wisdom to materialist atheism.

Nor am I opposed to Israel's vision of what modernity ought to be. On the whole I subscribe to it, though I have nothing like his certainty that his version of Enlightenment radicalism is the only sure path to it. I too want a liberal and democratic republic; the strict rule of law, unlimited freedom of thought and expression; a clean separation of church and state, a thoroughly secular legal system, and unqualified toleration; and an egalitarian distribution of wealth and life chances, eliminating both class and gender inequalities that are obviously still very much with us. Having been educated by the Jesuits, I even have a soft spot for Israel's anti-clericalism.

I also find that Israel does us a considerable service in advocating (as opposed to practising) a methodological new departure. He calls it the 'controversialist' method of 'a new, reformed intellectual history' (p. 23). A self-defined contextualist, he lays out a strategy for getting us beyond what he sees as the recent sins of contextualism. Even as he credits the Cambridge School of the history of political thought with 'thicken(ing)' our notion of 'the textual and linguistic context of ideas' (p. 16), he faults it for being too narrow, particularly in ignoring 'social structures and pressures' (p. 17). To an extent I share his discontent; looking back on the School's early self-theorization, I find that its determination to avoid social reductionism bordered on the phobic. It must be added that many of its current practitioners have moved beyond this position, thus avoiding a

history (Baltimore, MD 1998), pp. 145–73. There is also a lucid parsing of the meanings of 'objectivity' in Allan Megill, *Historical knowledge, historical error: a contemporary guide to practice* (Chicago, IL, 2007), pp. 107–24.

[5] See the comments on 'making at least some use of the Enlightenment' in David A. Hollinger, 'The Enlightenment and the genealogy of cultural conflict in the United States', in Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *What's left of Enlightenment? A postmodern question* (Stanford, CA, 2001), pp. 7–18.

straitjacketing of the very contextual understanding of past ideas to which they are committed.[6] But for Israel's purposes such work offers little comfort. His main targets are French 'diffusionists' and Anglo-American practitioners of the 'new social and cultural history'. In the face of these developments in Enlightenment studies Israel is at his most dismissive; he sees them as wrong turns, merely 'fashionable' but still very costly. At this opposite pole from the Cambridge School, Israel finds that context is conceived too broadly. The preoccupation with how 'articulated ideas' became cultural 'attitudes' in processes of diffusion, and with how they informed new practices of sociability, virtually precludes serious consideration of their significance as ideas.

Israel's alternative is to understand the Enlightenment, both in its own historical terms and as a vital intellectual resource for our present purposes, by examining its ideas squaring off against each other, particularly in moments of heightened public controversy. If we are to grasp what was at stake in Enlightenment debates, and if we are to make the right choices among their conflicting ideas, we have to study seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moments in an evolving field of argument. And that means that, in defiance of recent approaches to the Enlightenment as a primarily social and cultural movement, we have to give ideas – philosophical ideas in the Enlightenment's broad sense – 'a hegemonic role' even as we contextualize them socially. This placing of intellectual history 'at the centre' will produce 'a restructured historical studies'. Though I do not share this vision, I think that, to a considerable extent, Israel's methodological point about the need for a 'controversialist' approach, with due attention to social forces and structures, is well taken. Many 'new' social and cultural historians will, to be sure, have good reason to object that Israel is caricaturing their work; what he sees as a neglect of ideas is often simply a different way of paying them due attention. But if his nightmare were to be realized (I see no reason to think it will be), Enlightenment studies would renege on one of its critical obligations. Exclusive attention to social and cultural dimensions would both distort the historical reality of the Enlightenment and fall well short of presenting it to us now as a pool of intellectual resources. We need more of the fresh scrutiny of fields of arguments that Israel advocates. In *The case for the Enlightenment* John Robertson has made the point cogently: as a body of ideas argued before an emerging 'public', the Enlightenment 'can be matched against the conditions which faced it in its own time'; 'its contribution to the modern world may then be judged on the intellectual interest of its reflections on the societies it observed, and on the cogency of its recommendations for the improvement of the human condition as it found it'.[7]

[6] The locus classicus is Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding', in James Tully, ed., *Meaning and context: Quentin Skinner and his critics* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), pp. 29–67. Some recent examples of a more socially contextualized approach to the history of political thought are Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva* (Cambridge, 1997); John Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 44.

[7] Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment*, p. 44.

And yet while Robertson's study contributes powerfully to this way of using historical analysis to assert the Enlightenment's continuing intellectual presence, Israel's book poses a serious danger to Enlightenment studies. If the danger is not immediately apparent, that is because Israel's authorial voice has two registers. In one, he presents himself as a politically engaged scholar, willing and eager to declare his ideological colours. He stands in an ideological arena in which fateful choices are to be made, and he employs his scholarship to fight the good fight. In the dominant register, however, he steps outside the arena to occupy what Thomas Nagel has called 'the view from nowhere' – a position from which the rationality of axiomatic principles and their corollaries is self-evident, and from which some thinkers' failure to recognize their self-evidence or apply them consequentially must be due to their intellectual (and perhaps moral) inability to see past historically contingent obstacles.[8] Intent on countering limitless relativism, Israel seems oblivious to the fact that, in claiming exemption from ideological distortion for his own position, he is resorting to a classic ideological sleight of hand. Though he acknowledges in the first chapter that the Radical Enlightenment's 'striving for universality and an overarching coherence' may be 'deeply suspect philosophically', it soon becomes abundantly clear that he thinks the 'radical' alternative was and is the *only* philosophically correct way of thinking rationally. Though his argument purports to be historical, it rests on that unhistorical assumption or, perhaps better, conviction. The result is a curiously contradictory modus operandi. On one level the volume grounds its claim to credibility in a remarkable historical density. Beneath the density, however, we find an essentially philosophical logic of explanation and interpretation, and one that is intolerantly rationalist in identifying and appraising the Enlightenment's legacies to modernity. Often, and particularly when the argument enters rough waters, that logic becomes its driving force in lieu of an historical understanding of the meaning of ideas, their interrelationships, and the processes of their mutation.

Again I proceed with some regret. An odd feature of modern academic life is that intellectual history and the history of philosophy (as a subfield of philosophy) remain largely oblivious of each other. With his controversialist approach, focusing on moments of heightened controversy when implicit disagreements became explicit and fault lines became more visible, Israel aims to bridge one of our widest disciplinary chasms. Historians of the Enlightenment who take up his cause will return philosophical ideas to the centre of their project. If historians of philosophy were to follow his cue, they would widen their inquiries beyond their guild's canon of 'philosophical' texts by reaching out to a wide array of texts expressing the Enlightenment's 'philosophical spirit'. Israel is not asking philosophers to accept social, psychological, or political forms of reductionism they have good reason to reject. Nor would his wider casting of the philosophical net distract from the canon. Arguably it would have the opposite effect; by reinserting

[8] Thomas Nagel, *The view from nowhere* (New York, NY, 1986).

canonical texts into the historical field of meanings in which they came into being, philosophers would confront themselves with more challenging interlocutors – texts whose philosophical import merits attention precisely because it defies assimilation into current assumptions about what is and is not legitimate philosophical inquiry.[9] But it is not just disciplinary solipsism that maintains the division of labour between the two modes of inquiry. They have different purposes – one to recover the contextual meaning of philosophical texts, the other to determine whether they work as philosophy, at least in the sense of helping philosophers think through or reformulate the questions they are now posing. Each discipline should be able to draw on help from the other without sacrificing the integrity of its mission. *Enlightenment contested* is a case in which the crossing of disciplinary lines has adverse implications for both sides.

Israel's choice of terms is revealing on this score. He describes radical thought as 'a package of basic concepts and values' (p. 866). By 'package' he does not mean simply a collection of ideas, or even a cluster of ideas. He means that this particular cluster of ideas is the *only* one with the 'high degree of continuity, coherence, and unity' (p. 868) that rational thought ought to have; and that that is why the radical package is so intellectually superior to its moderate competitor and came to be recognized as such by the substantial minority of Enlightenment thinkers who did not succumb to expediency. As Israel uses the terms, 'coherence' and 'unity' imply an ineluctable progression from a foundational principle to *all* the principles that he sees necessarily flowing from it. The principle is Spinoza's monist or one-substance materialism, which sees nature, including human life, as a self-creating infinitude, with motion innate in matter, without admitting any form of supernatural agency. Around this completely secular core vision forms, with iron logic, a holistic system of philosophical commitments to the autonomy of individuals, legal, political, and social equality, including gender equality, unlimited toleration, and so on. The moderates landed in contradictions and expedient compromises because they did not proceed from the Spinozist premise. Radical thought achieved coherence and unity because it did proceed from the premise. We may object that in many of Israel's radical texts parts of the whole are not stated. No matter; they are nonetheless there, if the reader is sufficiently aware of inherent links and immanent implications.

To the extent that Israel attempts to convert this philosophical logic into an analysis of historical process, it is by showing that complete rejection of theological and ecclesiastical authority led to rejection of other forms of authority. Even then, though, the tendency to ground the argument in a philosophical 'ought' is quite evident. What I will call Israel's package logic elides an historical reading of the ideas that actually clustered in texts into a philosophical claim about what ideas, by the meta-historical rules of right reason, *ought* to have clustered

[9] There is now a considerable literature on whether and how philosophy ought to historicize its engagement with its own past. See my 'Doing Fichte: reflections of a sobered (but unrepentant) contextual biographer', in Hans Erich Bödeker, ed., *Biographie schreiben* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 107-71.

in them. That is why Israel is often so confident in attributing principles to 'radical' thinkers that their texts do not exhibit.

One of my concerns is that Israel's version of philosophical history abuses, and hence will discredit, a claim that needs to be made: that broadly philosophical ideas had (and have) a power of causal agency in their own right, however much they are socially and culturally inflected. It is one thing to posit that power, as Israel does so forcefully, but quite another to demonstrate how it works and how far it extends in a particular historical context. In his first chapter Israel stakes out a widening circle of claims. That the Radical Enlightenment was 'remarkably successful' in 'continually unsettling the middle ground' (p. 12) is perhaps the case. It certainly confronted the mainstream Enlightenment with a threat, at the other extreme from the counter-enlightenment, against which it had repeatedly to draw its boundaries and erect its defences. But what does it mean to say that in the early 1750s 'the radical wing … [became], in the French-speaking world, the dominant partner' (p. 862)? Clearly the reference is to the intellectual arena formed by radicals and moderates, but how are we to gauge the relative power of their respective ideas? Israel's broadest claim is that neither the moderates nor counter-enlightenment forces were able to prevent 'the growing seepage of radical ideas into the public sphere – and eventually the popular consciousness' (p. 12). Perhaps he plans to document this seepage in the next volume. To appreciate the difficulty he has created for himself, we have to keep in mind that Israel is not simply arguing that the radicals' broad programme for democratic social and political reform '[infiltrated] popular culture and consciousness' (p. 12); he has assumed the task of showing that that programme won the 'battle' for popular opinion because the coherence of its one-substance (Spinozist) logic gave it a cogency in the eyes of readers and listeners that no alternative could offer. It is hard to imagine how that could be demonstrated textually. More to the point, though, is that we have good reason to suspect that Israel will see no need to take up the challenge. The causal power of ideas he has in mind is not generated in processes of reception; their agency is a function of their inherent power.[10]

This is to say that Israel's package logic burdens him with a self-inflicted problem; it subjects his history to a constricted philosophical standard of his own making. For us to grant his radical package the historical agency he wants to give it, and for the reason he wants to do so, he would have to demonstrate that it had (has) complete coherence and unity in his sense. No easy task. The fact that Diderot did not designate his 'party' simply as 'Spinozists', but as 'new' and 'modern' Spinozists (p. 792), points to complications in the radical package that Israel glosses over. The concepts of force and motion in Spinoza's materialism are thoroughly mechanistic. As Israel shows, Diderot and his fellow radicals drew on a hylozoic vitalism whose axiom principle is not that mechanistic motion is inherent

[10] On the complexities of processes of reception, see Roger Chartier, '*The order of books* revisited', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (2007), pp. 509–19, and David D. Hall, 'What was the history of the book: a response', in ibid., pp. 537–44.

in matter, but rather that motion, in the form of growth, realizes the telos of a shaping life force. Clearly both kinds of materialism can lead to the total exclusion of supernatural agency and theological truth claims. But as the foundational sources for modern concepts of human autonomy, and for the use of 'nature' as the normative standard for morality, social relations, and political authority, mechanism and vitalism have quite different implications. Entering the second half of the eighteenth century, there are, at the least, tensions between purely Spinozist radicalism and vitalist radicalism.[11]

It is perhaps obvious that there is also a tension, and perhaps an outright contradiction, between what Israel himself calls a 'deterministic' Spinozist materialism (or naturalism) and the concept of individual self-determination he finds in radical thought. He recognizes this problem, but his claim that radicals solved it by conceiving freedom as the pursuit of enlightened self-interest is not convincing. A final example: concepts of equality and justice in Israel's Radical Enlightenment seem to rest on two quite different ways of understanding sameness and difference in human beings. In an intriguing discussion of late seventeenth-century Dutch radicals, Israel finds them basing the principle of equality on a 'moral equivalence' among human beings in their needs and wills (p. 554). That principle would seem to be framed in part to counter the anti-egalitarian objection that people differ in their rational capacities. Several pages later we find d'Alembert (and others) opposing aristocratic privilege with a concept of equality that would replace 'birth' with 'talent' (p. 565). Here the logic of social 'justice' is precisely that there should be different rewards for different kinds and degrees of 'merit', in recognition of the fact that there is not an 'equivalence' in people's talents or abilities, including their rational capacities. We can imagine the Dutch version justifying a radical levelling of social inequality in any form; d'Alembert's would replace a legally structured corporate hierarchy with a meritocratic hierarchy. Borrowing a phrase from Hobbes, Israel unites these two rationales for equality under the rubric '"equality of hope" in fulfilling our aspirations' (p. 552). That simply obscures the tensions between them.

Historians may regard Israel's failure to demonstrate the unity and coherence he claims for radical thought as a minor lapse, but it is not. Throughout his narrative, the attribution of a singular coherence to radical thought underpins a philosophical logic of explanation and interpretation. It grounds an apparently historical argument, drives it forward, and sometimes surfaces with unapologetic explicitness. We begin to sense its shaping force, and its constrictions, when Israel introduces 'successive counter-enlightenments' (p. 11) pitted against both the moderate and radical enlightenments in the 'historical' (as opposed to 'philosophical') constitution of modernity. His chain of counter-enlightenments begins with Bossuet and culminates in post-modernism (and post-colonialism). An odd linkage. On the key issue of epistemological and moral relativism, it would be

[11] Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley, CA, 2005); Robert J. Richards, *The romantic conception of life: science and philosophy in the age of Goethe* (Chicago, IL, 2002), esp. pp. 207–29.

hard to find more polar opposites than Bossuet and, say, Derrida or Foucault. But post-modernism, it turns out, is not what we might expect it to be. Israel does not name a single one of the usual suspects – not in the text, and not in the footnotes. By his definition, the key voices of post-modernism on the subject of the Enlightenment – and now the sprawl of the category borders on the bizarre – are Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. Both thinkers do fault the Enlightenment for an ethically hollow rationalism that claims to be universal but in fact leads to boundless subjectivism. But they are clearly critics of modern and post-modern relativism; post-modernists, by any useable definition of that term, they are not.[12]

Israel's counter-enlightenment is at once monolithic and spectral. Its alter-ego is a monolithic Enlightenment – or, more precisely, two monolithic Enlightenments locked in an irreconcilable bipolar conflict despite the occasional overlaps between them. His *en bloc* approach requires a Spinozist 'continuity' in radical thought across roughly a century. As the volume progresses, the continuity also assumes a spectral quality. Numerous examples could be taken from Israel's reading of the lesser radical figures, but his argument might be able to sustain those losses. Pierre Bayle is another matter; Israel makes him the vital link in the transmission of Spinozist radicalism from the late seventeenth century to the eighteenth century. Unquestionably Bayle was influenced by Spinoza, but influence does not suffice for Israel's philosophical history. He has to claim that Bayle's thought was 'Spinozist' in the strong sense that a monist materialism, excluding any possibility of a 'God' distinct from nature, was its indispensable, though usually hidden, ground. In Israel's analysis of Bayle's arguments with Le Clerc and other Huguenot *rationaux* in the moderate camp we see how informative and rich in textual exegesis his controversialist strategy can be. And yet Bayle's Spinozism is more asserted than textually demonstrated. At the end the reader is left wondering why she should not take seriously Bayle's explicit condemnation of 'atheism' as well as 'deism' (and 'Socinianism') (p. 85); his view of the individual conscience as 'the voice and the law of God'; and the darker side of his estimation of reason, which emphasized its power to destroy without rebuilding.[13] Israel tries to preclude this scepticism by arguing that Bayle's notoriously evasive style was designed to hide his 'crypto-Spinozism'. I think that reading evades the real issue lurking behind Bayle's slipperiness. How was it that Bayle advocated some quite radical principles, and most notably unlimited toleration, *despite* his rejection of Spinoza's one-substance doctrine? And why not accept the obvious implication: that Spinozism was not the indispensable grounding for radical thought?

In the treatment of Bayle and others we find one inferential direction that Israel's package logic takes: because a thinker advocated all the radical positions,

[12] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After virtue: a study in moral theory* (2nd edn, Notre Dame, 1984); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

[13] An exceptionally balanced discussion of the complexities of Bayle's thought is Ruth Whelan, 'Bayle, Pierre', in Alan Charles Kors, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, I (Oxford, 2003), pp. 121–5.

or even just some of them, his thought must have been premised on Spinozist materialism, however hidden it may have been. When the logic loops back, the inference is that, because a thinker was a Spinozist, he must have subscribed to the entire array of radical positions, even though some were left immanent and unstated. The pitfalls of this latter move become cavernous when Israel discusses the egalitarian programme of his Radical Enlightenment. Though he often smudges the distinctions among them, he is in fact talking about at least three distinct kinds of equality: legal, political, and social. No doubt the Radicals' vision of a just society did include a large measure of equality under the law. In the contexts of old-regime corporate hierarchies, that was no minor breakthrough. His claim that radicals, in sharp contrast to moderates, also espoused 'modern democratic republicanism' is far more questionable. As he demonstrates, Dutch and French radical thought included a rich discourse of opposition to monarchies resting on oligarchic rule, whether the oligarchy was a titled aristocracy (as in France) or a landed gentry (as in England). But did their notion of democracy, or the sovereignty of 'the people', extend civic rights not just to people with property and education in what Hume called 'the middle station of life'[14] but also to the great mass of the population below them, or at least the great mass of males? Enter (again) Israel's package logic; he wants us to believe that, when political democracy in this inclusive sense was not made explicit in radical texts, it was nonetheless an immanent implication of their Spinozist monism; and hence that they point us directly to our own political democracies. I conclude, from Israel's own synopses of the relevant texts, that an inclusive idea of democracy was simply absent; and that, in the social and cultural contexts of early modern Europe, the absence is not at all surprising. Our disagreement turns in part on what Israel's radicals themselves concluded from their view of the masses' seemingly limitless appetite for religious superstition and political servitude, and on what radicals had in mind when they called for popular 're-education'. Israel would have to demonstrate that re-education was aimed not just at the broad dissemination of 'useful' knowledge, but also at qualifying the great mass for voting and other civic responsibilities. I see no evidence of that in his discussion of the texts. Since the late eighteenth century the conceptual transition from a republic with limited democracy to a far more inclusive democratic republic has been halting and quite bumpy; and neither Spinozism nor any equivalent materialist philosophy has a credible claim to having been indispensable to it.

Israel's package veers most sharply from textual evidence when he extends the Radical Enlightenment's egalitarianism to gender equality. The problem begins at the source, with Spinoza's own package. Israel acknowledges that Spinoza 'relegates women … to a permanently dependent status, denying them the right to participate in his democratic republic'. But, he continues, 'his argument leaves open the possibility that should women somehow, someday, assert their

[14] David Hume, 'Of the middle station of life', in Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar, eds., *David Hume: selected essays* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 5–9.

independence from husbands and fathers, and act as equals to men, they would then be entitled to vote and participate in politics' (p. 557). On this reading, if we want to recover Spinoza's thought as a crucial source for modern feminism, we need only rid it of errors by conducting what historians of philosophy call a 'rational reconstruction'. But philosophers conduct such reconstructions for their quite different purposes. The historical question is why Spinoza, despite his concept of 'natural' equality, consigned women to permanent dependence. If we are faced with such a breakdown of coherence in Spinoza's thought, where we should least expect it, what happens to the whole argument about inherent links in Spinozist-grounded radicalism? If the breakdown reflects contextual constraints on Spinoza's rationalism, should we not expect to find similar constraints, with similar effects, in what Israel wants us to accept as the holistic unity of Enlightenment Spinozism?

In Israel's argument for the Spinozist continuity of radical thought, Poullain de la Barre, arguably the first modern feminist, is an irremovable hurdle. As Israel makes clear, Poullain's dictum that 'the mind has no sex' derives from Cartesian mind/body dualism, and not from Spinozist monism. That, Israel contends, is why Poullain, unlike Spinozist radicals, failed to see that the emancipation of women required a fundamental reform of family life. There is something tortuous about this way of juxtaposing Poullain to the putatively Spinozist advocates of female emancipation. The insistence on the 'continuity' of one intellectual lineage (Spinozism) distracts us from a question that threatens to shred it: why Poullain's most radical feminist positions had no heirs until, at the earliest, the close of the eighteenth century. What makes Poullain's feminism so precociously modern is his argument that women should enjoy equality with men in their access to higher education and the occupations to which it led, including state offices and the higher professions.[15] So far as I can tell, this notion of gender equality as equality of opportunity is not to be found in the thought of any of Israel's Spinozist advocates of equality, including Diderot. Here we find a particularly weak link in the package logic. Israel assumes that when a radical materialist advocated the 'liberation of the human libido' in women as well as men, he intended also to open the door, at least implicitly, to gender equality in education and employment as well as civic rights. All these forms of emancipation certainly go together in contemporary western feminism. But I see no textual evidence that they went together in the radical thought of the period covered in this volume – and many reasons, in the ideas in question and in their contexts, for thinking that they did not. Diderot is the most striking and important case in point. He was a passionate advocate of sexual and erotic emancipation, intent on liberating women from repressive Christian moral strictures. But one need only

[15] François Poullain de la Barre, *Three Cartesian feminist treatises*, introd. Marcelle Maistre Welch and trans. Vivien Bosley (Chicago, IL, and London, 2002). *On the Education of ladies* (1674) is usually treated as an elaboration of Poullain's position in *On the equality of the two sexes* (1673), but in fact represents a retreat from his advocacy of equality of opportunity for women in the first text.

read his 'On women' (not mentioned by Israel) to realize that, far from opening the possibility of equality of opportunity for women, his biologically essentialist materialism made women's intellectual capacities innately inferior to men's. His calls for sexual liberation notwithstanding, that estimation went hand in hand with an ideal of domesticity that would keep women firmly constricted to the roles of wife and mother.[16]

And then there are the moderates. If we accept Israel's rationalist standard (a big 'if' for many readers), their thought probably is more vulnerable to the charge of incoherence than the thought of radicals, though the latter are by no means to be acquitted on that count. But that appraisal helps us little, if at all, in our efforts to understand historically why moderates – Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, and a host of lesser figures – did not see their positions as incoherent. To the extent that Israel goes beyond an analysis of what he sees as their cognitive failures, he explains their incoherence as a moral failure. His largest measure of opprobrium is aimed at Voltaire, whom he sees rejecting radical principles for a timid Anglophilia and cozying up to the French monarchy and, worse, the Jesuits. Other moderates, eager to stay on the right side of the old-regime Establishment, also betrayed a lack of moral courage; and in some cases, most notably Montesquieu, this timidity resulted in a hypocritical disconnect between private beliefs and public lives.

We all harbour judgements of this sort, but as historians we have to make every effort to keep them suspended as we try to understand norms, beliefs, and arguments with which we disagree, and which we may find thoroughly wrongheaded. Israel has particular reason to avoid critiquing thought by reference to thinkers' lives. That approach sits very oddly with his effort to provide a critique of ideas as such, on purely rational grounds. It becomes all the more suspicious as we come to realize that he is applying a double standard. On the possible inconsistencies between his subjects' intellectual principles and their lives, the moderates are given very little slack, while the radicals generally get a pass. Quite a few radicals did not let their convictions interfere with their enjoyment of aristocratic wealth and privilege. Fontenelle – a lionized figure in the aristocratic salons of *le monde*, and the permanent secretary of the Royal Academy of Sciences – is classified somehow as a radical, despite his distance from radical social and political positions. And so he gets a very broad pass. The larger point, of course, is that this kind of moral scoring is at cross purposes with historical understanding. Israel's moral logic is no less meta-historical than is his philosophical logic; it does not guide us into the historically specific moral universes in which his subjects' perceptions of choice were formed.

[16] Denis Diderot, *Sur les femmes*, in *Oeuvres*, ed. André Billy (Paris, 1951), pp. 949–58. See also Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The moral sex: woman's nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (New York, NY, 1995), pp. 44–7; Jenny Mander, 'No woman is an island: the female figure in French Enlightenment anthropology', in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, eds., *Women, gender, and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 97–116.

And so we return to the big issues: what forms should a new intellectual history of the Enlightenment take, and how can such a history make the Enlightenment effectively present and useable for us now. In principle Israel's controversialist approach promises to give the Enlightenment back to intellectual history; but his practice contradicts that aim. His underlying logic for attributing agency to ideas is simply not historical. The same must be said of the logic of his textual interpretations. Readers who accept this critique of *Enlightenment contested* face the task of profiting from its sweeping erudition even as they remain aware of a flaw so basic as seriously to damage the credibility of the volume as a whole.

How, then, do we effectively include the study of controversies in our efforts to make the intellectual resources of the Enlightenment continually available? Our first task – the historical task – is to bracket out any notion that, by Israel's purportedly universal standard of rationality, some ideas have – or ought to have – greater historical agency than others because they have more inherent power. The point of focusing on the field of ideas that forms in public controversy is not to declare winners and losers, but to retrieve the meanings of the ideas positionally, in the way they are shaped to address each other within the field's historical particularity, so that we can understand them historically before we judge them philosophically (or politically).[17] Suppose we want to give this historicized reading of public controversies the space it should have in Enlightenment studies, but also want to embed it in a new intellectual history that is, in method, at once more encompassing and more hermeneutically probing. Recent scholarship tracks many routes to this end, but what they have in common, I will suggest, is a concern with the broadly rhetorical dimensions and properties of texts. I prefer the term 'rhetoric' here in contradistinction to 'discourse'. As it has sometimes been used, discourse evokes a linguistic regime that leaves little or no room for the purposeful agency of individual authors. In a rhetorical approach agency can be conceived as a kind of chemical process with three elements: the contents of ideas as such, the mediations they pass through as they are consumed by an historically specific audience, and authors' choices of the forms of communication with which they want to affect those mediations. As practitioners of rhetoric in its many modes authors-as-agents exercise a measure of choice by drawing on, and sometimes breaking out of, sets of conventions that we categorize with terms like genre, authorial voice, and style. This view of rhetoric, with all it implies about writing as a situated act for situated audiences, gives us ways to excavate social and cultural meanings of philosophical texts that are related to, but not reducible to, the 'cultural sociology' that Israel finds running amok in Enlightenment studies. It directs us to practices in literary scholarship with a contextual orientation – practices that contradict sprawling equations of recent

[17] On this approach to an intellectual 'field', see Fritz K. Ringer, *Fields of knowledge: French academic culture in comparative perspective* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–25; Christian J. Emden, *Nietzsche on language, consciousness, and the body* (Urbana, IL, 2005), pp. 1–7.

and current literary scholarship with the a-historical (or anti-historical) and hyper-relativist posture of 'post-modernism'.

There is a hermeneutic flatness to Israel's reading of texts.[18] As he practises it, a controversialist approach abstracts from the texts the broadly philosophical propositions that he sees configuring into fields of public argumentation. We learn little else about how meanings – not only philosophical, but also social and cultural – were constituted in them, or about tensions, ironies, and shifts of perspective audible beneath the argumentative surface. The qualified exception – Israel's reading of Diderot's *Pensées philosophiques* (1746) – turns out to be a very safe one. Having alerted readers to 'an unmistakable instability of both perspective and argument' in the *Pensées*, Israel finds that it 'already point(s) to what has rightly been called "'le spinozisme radical de Diderot"' (p. 789).

Arguably this kind of reading is at cross-purposes with Israel's own corrective to the history of philosophy. His remarkably encompassing discussion of texts representing the Enlightenment's 'philosophical spirit' aims to broaden philosophy's engagement with its own past. But at the same time his distillation of arguments may very well encourage a longstanding tendency in philosophy to regard its demonstrative reasoning as hovering above the contextual embeddedness of rhetoric. The rhetorical approach I have in mind would have the opposite effect: to show that in the Enlightenment, as in our own era, philosophical argument is not as self-contained as some philosophers would like it to be; that it is permeable to stylistic practices, and particularly to uses of figurative language, from other rhetorics in the culture at large.[19] A case in point is the crisscrossing rhetorical conventions that we find in Enlightenment anti-religious scepticism. Two concepts, superstition and enthusiasm, are used to convey the credulity of 'the vulgar'. It is not at all surprising that in *Enlightenment contested* the concept of 'superstition' figures large but concepts of enthusiasm receive hardly any attention, though Israel's radicals were as alarmed by it as were his moderates. When Enlightenment thinkers called for popular 'enlightenment' to dispel the 'superstition' with which a power-hungry 'priestcraft' kept the unlettered masses under its spell, they were indeed pursuing the emancipatory agenda Israel finds in their thought, though it was rarely a democratic agenda. The rhetorical trope of 'enthusiasm' was far more labile, and in some of its usages it gave scepticism about supernatural agency a quite different social and political valence. One of its common referents was deviant popular religiosity; a wide range of assembled believers asserting their independence from established confessional authority and orthodoxy were branded 'enthusiasts'. Why did 'radicals' not welcome such groups? Were they not giving their members an opportunity to exercise individual

[18] One need only compare Israel's readings with the interpretation of Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of Edmund Burke's rhetoric in Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 58–70.

[19] An example is my 'Thinking about marriage: Kant's liberalism and the peculiar morality of conjugal union', *Journal of Modern History*, 77 (2005), pp. 1–34.

autonomy in the face of institutionalized superstition? The answer is not simply that the enthusiasts' conviction of immediate inspiration and their intensely emotional expressiveness were, by radical standards, anything but rational. 'Enthusiasm' figured the broad masses as highly susceptible to a kind of mob psychology. From this angle the problem was not the passive credulity of the masses, but their volatility. Images of enthusiasm marked an educated elite's fear of chronic and perhaps ineradicable pathology at the base of the social pyramid, explained metaphorically, and sometimes literally, as a phenomenon of 'contagion'. A crowd in the grip of enthusiasm threatened public authority and indeed the very stability of social order. It proved how coercive apparently free public communication, particularly in the form of lay preaching, could be. These were hardly egalitarian perceptions, and the implications drawn from them were more authoritarian than democratic.[20] The fact that they are to be found on both sides of Israel's divide gives us added reason to question his contrast between radical egalitarianism and moderate elitism.

It would be unfair to fault Israel for largely ignoring fiction and other forms of imaginative literature in a book that required 871 pages to accomplish his purpose. And yet this absence points to the severe limitation that Israel's package logic imposes on his practice of intellectual history. His way of reading texts simply cannot deal with the dense interplay of content and form, thought and representation, in some rhetorical practices, including texts that are directly relevant to his remapping of the Enlightenment. Consider Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), 'a sort of novel', in its author's own phrase, which made its great splash right in the middle of the period covered in this volume but receives only intermittent and cursory attention. For Israel the *Lettres* are one more site for the Spinozist tendencies Montesquieu tried to keep hidden; for his engagement in the toleration debate provoked by Bayle; and for 'the subtle anti-feminism running through his œuvre.' That the treatment of women in the *Lettres* is 'subtle' is quite clear. Calling it anti-feminist impoverishes the text for the sake of Israel's bipartite division into camps. Understanding Montesqieu's views on women and gender requires an exploration of the multiple voices and perspectives at play in the epistolary form of the text, and particularly in the ironic twists and turns of the seraglio plot. How are we to read the final revelation, Roxana's defiant suicide letter to Usbek, spitting with utter contempt on his self-deluded expectation of love from women he held in a 'servitude' that thwarted all their true desires? 'I have amended your laws according to the laws of nature', Roxana writes, 'and my mind has always remained independent.'[21] However we read the letter, its claim to human freedom, libidinal, intellectual, and moral, resists reduction to one side or the other in Israel's division into Radical and Moderate camps, and indeed to the very distinctions that inform that division.

[20] On the varied usages of 'enthusiasm' see Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa, eds., *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850* (San Marino, CA, 1998).

[21] Montesquieu, *Persian letters*, trans. C. J. Betts (London, 1973), p. 280.

We find the same flatness in Israel's reading of the third earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times*.[22] In Israel's bipartite schema, Shaftesbury becomes an in-between figure, radical in his secularism and his 'true republican [idealism]', but moderate in his 'delicate reclusiveness and elitist, anti-democratic tendency' and hence 'part of the problem' (p. 349). In this case, as in many others, the choice Israel offers us – democratic or elitist – is simply too crude to be historically workable; it misses the ways in which Shaftesbury's prose, elitist though he surely was by our democratic standards, challenged the representation and imposition of authority – religious, cultural, and political – in his own times. This form of critique, no less integral to the Enlightenment's new philosophical spirit than Spinozist rationalism, was exercised in rhetorical experimentation. Shaftesbury and others brought to it a self-consciousness that was itself philosophical and political in significance. They were acutely aware of the implications of their choices. One of the key ways in which they advocated individual autonomy was to practise it in new forms of communication, positing new relational terms between author and readers. For Shaftesbury the forms were the letter, the dialogue, and the essay, often intermingling in his texts. He used them to imagine a 'commonwealth of letters' in which authors, readers, and critics simulated spirited conversation among friends. The public exchange of 'advice' and polite 'raillery' would, to be sure, be limited to 'gentlemen'; but it was posed against a wide array of early eighteenth-century uses of language to impose authority on passive subjects. Some of these were, by Israel's criteria, traditional: the magistrate, the clergyman, the conventional rhetorician. But Shaftesbury's other target was systematic philosophers, including those advocating mechanistic materialism and societies and polities driven by the motive force of self-interest. That is a measure of how complex the cross-firing in the Enlightenment's questioning of authority, and with it the exercise of power, had become by the early eighteenth century.

Hume took aim at the same target, using similar rhetorical strategies, and that gives us a way of understanding his modernity quite different from Israel's. On social and political issues, Israel is probably right to make Hume a key figure in the Anglophile moderate camp, and indeed to characterize his thought as 'conservative', despite the philosopher's radical positions on religion and freedom of expression. With the notable exception of religion, Hume did eschew radical critique of British social and political institutions. Rather than subjecting them to the detached scrutiny of reason, he tended to grant them legitimacy as the ethical products of the passions operating in 'custom', even as his 'science of man' aimed at plumbing the social and moral psychology beneath the cake of custom. 'Integral to all variants of Spinosime', Israel writes, 'was the doctrine that geometrical "reason" is the only criterion for truth.' Paraphrasing Voltaire, he characterizes this position as 'completely anti-sceptic(al)', 'allowing no room for doubt' (p. 45). Fair enough. But why is this position to be considered the

[22] Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999).

Enlightenment's singularly modern legacy to modernity? Positioned in a more historical perspective, Hume rejected the Spinozist route not because he was too attached to the status quo to reason consequentially, but because he had good reason to regard the systems built on 'geometric' rationalism over the previous century or so either as empty or as self-deluded in their claims to be free of the contingent beliefs of custom, and in any case as ossified. Israel's radicals saw the construction of modernity as a process of building a new world on principles that were transparently true to any rational person. Hume saw it as a matter of practising rational critique within a disposition to live constructively with uncertainty. This too is a vital part of the Enlightenment's philosophical modernity; and in the face of the kind of certainty Israel wants us to embrace, it may be our best option.[23]

All this is to say that foundationalist rationalism à la Spinoza – the kind that Israel finds so appealing because its abstract universals that seem locked together in a system with leak-proof rational coherence – is not as unambiguously emancipatory as he would like it to be. There is a long concern *within* the Enlightenment that rationalism of this systematic sort, dismissing any criticism from outside its walls as an attack on reason itself, betrays an authoritarian impulse. In principle, to be sure, the rational agent may be radically self-determining; but embodied in a system, with all its propositions asserted as the necessarily true corollaries of a grounding truth, reason seeks to dispense with individual choice even as it champions individual autonomy. Sceptics of this strain of Enlightenment philosophy had good reason to suspect that lurking behind its apparent commitment to eliciting rational consent was an impulse to accept nothing less than capitulation. Perhaps more than any other Enlightenment thinker, Hume sought to counter that impulse not only with new ways of understanding cognition, but also with new ways of communicating philosophical thought as a participant *in* custom, addressing the rhetorical community constituted by the modern print market. This rhetorical shift from the conventional philosophical voice of sovereign detachment is most apparent, of course, in his essays. He leaves no doubt that he regards himself and his projected audience of 'elegant' readers as obviously superior to the great mass 'immersed in animal life', and that the 'polite' women he wants to win over will be, from an intellectual standpoint, second-class citizens.[24] And yet the form of communication has an emancipatory significance, and an emphatically modern one, that is detachable from that posture. It profits modern egalitarians to read Hume because he shows us, with an eye to foundational and systematic rationalism's temptation to place itself beyond questioning, how to communicate with readers on terms of equality and reciprocity, within a shared commitment to accept uncertainty even as we subject the irrational to critique.

[23] This concept of an Enlightenment 'disposition' is indebted to Emma Rothschild, *Economic sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), esp. pp. 15–17, 250–2.

[24] David Hume, 'Of essay writing', in Copley and Edgar, eds., *David Hume: selected essays*, pp. 1–5.

This is the experiment in a new philosophical rhetoric that Hume had begun in Book One of *A treatise on human nature* (1739–40). Israel reads the *Treatise* as Hume's first statement of his preference for custom over reason, and hence for a status quo not defensible on rational grounds. Book One is much richer, and much more innovative, than that characterization of it as a 'moderate' failure to be philosophically consequential would lead us to believe. Hume's authorial persona enacts his own quest for a critical position within a disposition of constructive uncertainty, escaping both the 'philosophical melancholy' of the radical sceptic and the philosophical 'superstition' of the hyper-rationalist. The result is a rhetorical tour de force that invites us, as co-participants, to undertake inquiries into elements of modernity that Israel's conveniently packaged rationalism would close down. Central to them are distinctly modern concepts of the self and character as fictions, but quite useable ones; of the construction of a moral compass not from self-evidently true abstractions, but in the empirical particularity of inter-subjective engagements; of the ethical implications of changes in human inter-subjectivity wrought by, among other things, the accelerating commercialization of social relations and specialization of knowledge.[25]

A rhetorical approach deepens our historical understanding of broadly philosophical texts not simply by exploring them from within, through the dimensions and levels of meaning I have described, but also by situating them in larger fields of inquiry. Israel's mapping of the current state of Enlightenment studies ignores ways in which our parameters for taking ideas seriously are actually widening. To an extent, to be sure, he makes good on his promise to give intellectual history the social dimension that the original programme of the Cambridge School so studiously avoided. He effectively brings structural contexts, both social and institutional, to bear on our understanding of texts at several points, including the rise of Dutch democratic republicanism in the second half of the seventeenth century, the moderates' triumph in the United Provinces in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and the culminating mid-eighteenth-century controversies in France. But Israel's 'social' alternative to the Cambridge School is largely a matter of relating texts to the collective social interests entrenched in early modern institutions. Most of the rest of the territory in Israel's map is occupied by a new social and cultural history preoccupied with the diffusion, reception, and application of ideas at the expense of understanding their past and present role in constituting philosophical and political modernity. Intellectual history dissolves into the study of changes in collective *mentalité*. What is missing from Israel's map is the space of inquiry in which we recover the past meaning of apparently familiar ideas by learning not only what roles they played in public

[25] David Hume, *A treatise of human nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, 2003), esp. pp. 121–78. Particularly illuminating on Hume's self-identity as philosopher and author are Donald W. Livingston, *Philosophical melancholy and delirium: Hume's pathology of philosophy* (Chicago, IL, 1998), esp. pp. 17–52. Susan Manning, *Fragments of union: making connections in Scottish and American writing* (Basingstoke, 2002).

arguments, but also how they worked, and were felt to work, in the wide variety of sources, including correspondence, journals and diaries, and autobiographical texts, in which authors articulated their subjectivity in solitary introspection as well as in engagement in social relations. It is in these spaces that we find historical subjects experiencing horizontal and vertical structures – institutionalized divisions between corporate groups, for example, and inequalities of class and status – as relational processes. The social and cultural codes to be found in them informed moral perceptions of choice in the past, though they cannot be subsumed under philosophical thought even in Israel's broad view of it. In these sites, no less than in public argument, we are likely to engage profitably the meanings and implications of Enlightenment ideas for us now.

The example Israel has set would not simply encourage us to eschew these spaces of inquiry; it would preclude our devoting attention to them. Even as he censors some thinkers' behaviour, he in effect erects a divide between the public reasoning he sees as the intellectual historian's proper subject and private experience. One of the advantages of the rhetorical approach I have in mind is that it has the opposite implication. It takes 'private' writing, as intimate as it may be, as public in the sense that the expression of thought is always, though to differing degrees, mediated by the rhetorical resources available to the writer. Even when the writer is engaged in solitary self-reflection, her words are 'witnessed', however indirectly, and are in that sense 'transactions of the social realm'.[26] In his periods of 'delicate reclusiveness', to recall Israel's phrase, Shaftesbury conducted intensely self-critical (and indeed self-flagellating) meditations on Stoic texts; and as he progressed from a sense of moral equilibrium to a sense of social selfhood in these exercises, he developed the rhetorical strategies for 'liberty' in public communication that characterize most of the essays in *Characteristics*.[27] His case is instructive: if a philosopher constructing a rational argument for a concept of individual autonomy kept a diary or a record of meditation, we would do well to consult it. We may find there, in the effort to live the concept, or at least to prepare to do so, the contextual resonances and refractions we need to understand its full

[26] The notion of 'witnessed' writing is from Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: adventures of a romantic biographer* (New York, NY, 1985), esp. pp. 66–9. The phrase 'transactions of the social realm' is from Nancy Struever, 'Philosophical problems and historical solutions', in Bernhard P. Dauenhauer, ed., *At the nexus of philosophy and history* (Athens, GA, 1987), p. 91. Gerald N. Izenberg has theorized something like the approach I am advocating in 'Text, context, and intellectual history', in H. Kozicki, ed., *Developments in modern historiography* (New York, NY, 1993), pp. 40–62, and has provided impressive examples of its practice in *Impossible individuality: romanticism, revolution, and the origins of modern selfhood* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), and *Modernism and masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky through World War I* (Chicago, IL, 2000). I have argued for this rhetorical approach to texts in 'Doing Fichte.'

[27] See esp. 'Sensus communis', 'Soliloquy, or advice to an author', and 'The moralists, a philosophical rhapsody', all in Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*. Shaftesbury, *Exercises*, trans. and ed. Laurent Jaffro (Paris, 1993), is a well-translated and annotated French edition of the Stoic meditations. On the relationship between the meditations and the essays see Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness* (Cambridge, 1994); Laurent Jaffro, *Ethique de la communication et art d'écrire: Shaftesbury et les Lumières anglaises* (Paris, 1998).

meaning. Likewise we may learn a great deal about what an author meant by autonomy when we hear him trying to preserve a measure of it, or acting with no expectation of exercising it, in his dealings with patrons.[28] Concepts of equality are no less open to examination in relational processes. We can plumb the term's meaning by seeing how the classical ideal of friendship, in which equality was a central element, was practised. Could someone be a friend and patron at the same time? How did equality work in friendships that crossed hierarchical boundaries? And what happened to the meaning of equality as the ideal of friendship was extended from relationships between men to relationships between men and women? Understanding the terms of the many recorded friendships between men and women in the Enlightenment is essential to reconstructing both the possibilities for female emancipation and the constraints on it.

These are just a few of the ways in which the study of public argument and the study of the rhetorics of 'private' writing can be mutually illuminating. The challenge facing a new intellectual history is to integrate these modes of recovering meaning into a hermeneutic that hears both the consonances and the discordances among them.

It may be that most Enlightenment scholars will find this critique all too obvious. They are well aware of the differences between philosophical and historical modes of explanation and interpretation. Nor do they need my warning to realize that Israel has arbitrarily shrunken the truly 'modern' legacy of the Enlightenment. And yet I suspect that Israel's overall argument will still have a certain appeal even to readers who, though not as sceptical as I am, have their doubts about his modus operandi. Timing is not quite everything, but it matters. *Enlightenment contested* seems to offer an unflinching certainty, an uncompromising reaffirmation of values, to an era badly in need of certainty. To defenders of western secular and liberal democracies there is, after all, something deeply reassuring about an Enlightenment – Israel's pure radical Enlightenment – that offers itself as an antidote to two extremes: an 'all ideas are equally valid' relativism, and the many forms of counter-enlightenment fundamentalism which relativism arguably provokes and seems helpless to counteract. But there is a high price for such reassurance. If we accept Israel's vision of a fully coherent radical Enlightenment and a hopelessly incoherent moderate Enlightenment, we not only impose an artificial dichotomy on an historical movement; we also forfeit the opportunity to learn from the Enlightenment's own efforts to avoid reducing human understanding to abstract reasoning – efforts that cannot be dismissed as expedient adaptations to an irrational status quo, but rather must be engaged as new and strikingly modern ways of exploring human consciousness and opening new spaces for human freedom. We allow Israel's lines of descent and divergence to

[28] An instructive example is the discussion of John Locke's relationship with his patron Alexander Popham in Jerrold Seigel, *The idea of the self: thought and experience in western Europe since the seventeenth century* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. pp. 108–9.

occlude emphatically modern avenues of Enlightenment thought that crisscross his division between radical and moderate – thought about, for example, interactions of body and mind in cognition to which neither monism nor mind/body dualism does justice, about the processes of social inter-subjectivity in which individual autonomy gets its footing, and about ways of negotiating the apparent dichotomy between universal and local knowledge, the abstract and the contingently particular. If we accept his package logic, we have no reason to make the interrogation of texts a process of self-interrogation, a way of seriously entertaining the possibility that principles we find self-evidently rational cannot survive the scrutiny that the alterity of past thought provokes us to undertake. The historical question is why ideas and configurations of ideas that strike us as less than fully rational, and perhaps as riddled with obvious contradictions, made sense to the people who thought them and acted on them. If we pursue that deceptively simple question, the Enlightenment becomes useable in a way that Israel's philosophical history precludes. We take the measure of our own apparently rational convictions, whether the result is to give greater intellectual strength to our commitments or to prod us into the self-criticism, the disposition of constructive uncertainty, needed to keep reasoned commitment at a safe distance from ideological entropy.