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William H. Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2008, \$35.00). Pp. xv + 435. ISBN 978 0 465 00495 9.

Beyond the Revolution, by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian William H. Goetzmann, is a compelling history of America's intellectual take-off in the years between 1776 and 1900. Starting from the American Revolution, which Goetzmann describes as an "adventure of the mind and a scene of creation" (17), the book lets American intellectuals narrate the story of their search for cultural self-definition. Paine and the Founding Fathers conceived the New World as a rational utopia, whose secular nature was grounded in the successes of the Scientific Revolution and in a renewed trust in the pursuit of rational inquiry. It was indeed the faith in method and order, along with a view of the intellectual as an "activist," that prompted American revolutionaries to take action toward the shaping of the New World.

Goetzmann insightfully suggests that the emphasis on inquiry as an eminently practical endeavour, which was especially strong in eighteenth-century science, paved the way to American Pragmatism and its substitution of truth with method. Yet the potential of this connection seems to remain partially unexplored as the reader moves on to the chapters on Pragmatism. A century after the Revolution, Pragmatism reawakened the spirit of experimentalism and practical knowledge that characterized the intellectual enterprise of the Founding Fathers. Goetzmann identifies Scottish "common-sense" realism as the link between the "minds of early America" (chapter 4) and late nineteenth-century Pragmatism. An expanded account of this connection would be greatly useful nowadays, as it would provide historical support to the current revival of philosophical interest in Pragmatism.

Encyclopedic and all-inclusive, Goetzmann's narrative alternates a traditional historical approach to the shaping of American identity with sophisticated discussions of individual movements and little-known innovators. Transcendentalism, abolitionism, African American intellectuals and the fight for women's rights are interspersed with compelling biographies of often historically neglected personalities. The emerging picture is one of complexity, cosmopolitanism and social flexibility. The constantly evolving character of America is presented by Goetzmann as the result of the dynamic, open-minded nature of its thinkers, whose ideas were in turn fuelled by the diverse inputs that only a genuinely cosmopolitan society can offer.

Goetzmann's work rests on the theoretical assumption that, in complex civilizations such as America, intellectuals act as the nodes of a network of ideas that would otherwise remain dispersed. One of his main concerns is to distinguish "civilizations" from "cultures." Cultures tend to be static and exclusive, whereas civilizations are open to innovation and naturally equipped with integrating mechanisms that absorb diversity and turn it into meaningful and useful information. This distinction, which has never been spelled out by historians, is crucial to understanding America's leading role as a source for scientific, technological and artistic development. Goetzmann is extremely cautious in developing such a compelling interpretative framework, which might have deserved greater visibility throughout

the book. Nonetheless, his captivating prose and sweeping historical analysis will inspire and reward the reader. *Beyond the Revolution* offers a comprehensive and original perspective on American intellectual history and will be essential reading for intellectual historians and anyone interested in exploring the origins of American identity.

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