

## ENLIGHTENED CONVERSATIONS: THE CAREER AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF ANTHONY J. LA VOPA

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If you have never had a conversation with Tony La Vopa—and I mean a serious, four-hour conversation, in which topics range from Rousseau to the Final Four to marzipan to Kant—you have missed out on one of academia’s great pleasures. Tony is one of intellectual history’s most beloved conversationalists: because he knows many things, because he loves to tell stories, because he listens, because he argues. He also, incidentally, has mastered the pithy, but somehow personal, email: he once wrote me, simply “You’re not resting,” and another time: “I’m alarmed about your porcelain addiction.” Those readers who know Tony only from his work on this journal or his published works will know the clarity, deep intelligence, and admirable density of his research and his editing, but may not know much about the conversations that he has sustained and that have sustained him across his career, and haven’t caught the impish glint in his eye when he launches into a story about his own current fetishes (photography, gooseberry *Küchen*), or lightly, invitingly, teases you about your own (according to Tony, mine include “loony men in gray suits”). And so, having had the pleasure of being a friend, coconspirator, and conversation partner of Tony’s for several decades now, I have gladly accepted the honor of further acquainting *Modern Intellectual History*’s readership with the career and contributions (so far!) of Anthony J. La Vopa, whose work has done so much to make intellectual history the thriving field it is today.

First, the basics. Born in the watershed year 1945, Tony began life as the archetype of a New Yorker: son of an Italian American, working-class father, he was raised amid pasta shops and overcrowded flats in the Bronx. A breathtakingly lyrical memoir he has written (but not published) about his early life, “Fishing from Memory,” depicts the sensual and emotional richness of growing up in this extended family’s sometimes cloying embrace. Less an autobiography than a sort of elegiacal genre painting (there is no self-indulgent psychologizing), “Fishing from Memory” describes Tony’s Irish mother’s struggles to fit into his father’s

Italian world, the terrors and pleasures of Catholic ritual life experienced by the young altar boy, and especially the serene joy of venturing out on fishing excursions with his beloved craftsman father, whose loss when Tony was barely thirteen he has mourned all his life. The memoir tells us more, on its face, about the fishing father, and yet it offers some insights into the formation of the historian. Educated strictly, but well, by Jesuit schoolmasters, Tony was in some ways a modern version of the ‘poor students’ about whom he would write so eloquently in *Grace, Talent, and Merit* several decades later. He has never forgotten the respect due to the work of the hands, nor the importance of education in opening new doors, nor the contrast between intelligence of different types—that of the fisherman, and that of the Jesuit Latinist. And in some ways, he has remained at heart a Bronxite on the edge of Long Island Sound, a lover of pasta and cityscapes, and a believer in the value of both education and fishing.

Tony’s own talents were early recognized, and furthered at Boston College, where he acquired his fascination with German history, thanks to the inspiration of the young John L. Heinemann. In 1967 he entered the graduate program at Cornell, where he studied with the great historian of early modern German “home towns” Mack Walker, and through Walker got to know Fritz K. Ringer, just at the time Ringer was finishing his *Decline of the German Mandarins*. In 1971–2 Tony spent an interesting but somewhat frustrating year in Germany on a Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst fellowship, in which he spent six months in a self-important and rather dispiriting Düsseldorf, and a second six in a crumby flat at the edge of the Tempelhof airstrip in a very tense West Berlin, at the height of the Baader–Meinhof affair. Under Walker’s guidance, and because social history was “in” at the time, Tony began a demographically based dissertation on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Prussian schoolmasters, and their endlessly failed campaigns to liberate themselves from the indignities and impoverishment imposed on them by the *Ständestaat*. By the time the dissertation appeared as a book, the born-and-bred Yankee had crossed the Mason–Dixon line to accept a position at North Carolina State University, Raleigh—and there he would stay, except for research trips and stints at the Max Planck Institut für Geschichte (and later the Lichtenberg Kolleg) in Göttingen, the Davis Center in Princeton, the Woodrow Wilson Center, the National Humanities Center, the European University Institute in Fiesole, and the University of Edinburgh.

At the time Tony took up his job at North Carolina State University at Raleigh, the Triangle was not the cosmopolitan place it is now, and he was greatly pleased when another intellectual historian, Steven Vincent, joined his faculty. The two have been fast friends ever since, and in 1995 were cofounders, together with Lloyd Kramer of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Malachi Hacohen of Duke University, of the Triangle Intellectual History Seminar. The seminar, I can personally attest, thanks to two memorable but improving flyings,

has been one of the premier venues, as well as toughest gigs, for presenting work in the field ever since. Even more important for the enriching of Tony's life was his friendship, and then second marriage, with a colleague in US history, Gail O'Brien, whose brilliance of mind and sweetness of temper has made her an incomparable soulmate. Tony also took a turn as chair of his department, just another sign of his commitment to his colleagues, and to the responsibilities that come with our academic freedoms.

In 2003 Tony and his coeditor in producing the *Intellectual History Newsletter*, Charlie Capper, had a brainstorm: why not turn the *Newsletter* into a fully fledged journal, to be published by a major university press? Recognizing that such a journal would need a UK editor—given the abundance of excellent work in the field traditionally produced in Britain—the two recruited the leading historian of the Scottish Enlightenment, Nicholas Phillipson, to join their team.<sup>1</sup> On the initiative of Ella Colvin, whom they all found a joy to work with, Cambridge University Press accepted their offer, and the first issue of *Modern Intellectual History* appeared in 2004. In 2005, Palgrave Macmillan asked Tony to take on the editing of a series in global cultural and intellectual history, and Tony recruited the literary scholar Javed Majeed and myself to explore possibilities in a field that proved to be booming. Before stepping down in 2013, Tony, Javed, and I oversaw the production of volumes on subjects ranging from Russian literature in Chinese translation to Benjamin Constant, from Czech modernism to the career of Mortimer J. Adler.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the two major books published during his career at NC State (*Grace, Talent, and Merit*, 1988, and *Fichte*, 2001), Tony has edited, with Lawrence J. Klein, *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850* (1998), and written a large number of essays (not all of which can be discussed here), including several seminal review essays. He retired from NC State in 2009 and from *MIH* in 2012, in order to tend to his health, which has not always been good, and to finish work on a wide-ranging study of masculinity and conversation in the works of several major French, Scottish, and English Enlightenment figures. But this is only the outline of Tony's scholarly contributions, whose chronological niceties and cerebral subtleties I will make a stab at elaborating below.

Dissertation research gave Tony a first taste of the joys and woes of studying eighteenth-century German social history. Locating full and usable records for a richly particularized and yet generalizable study—the everlasting needle-in-a-haystack quest that dogs the early modern Germanist even today—took Tony to many a provincial archive, but he finally settled on milking the sources

<sup>1</sup> See Colin Kidd's essay on Phillipson's career and contributions, "The Phillipsonian Enlightenment," in *Modern Intellectual History*, 11/1 (2014), 175–90.

<sup>2</sup> For a full list of titles, see [www.palgrave.com/series/results/CIH](http://www.palgrave.com/series/results/CIH).

from Düsseldorf, Berlin, and Münster, producing a dissertation and then book (*Prussian Schoolteachers: Profession and Office, 1763–1848* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), which took the story of the teachers' quest for reform down to 1848, and dealt extensively with numbers: salaries, population figures, attendance statistics. Well worth rereading today, this social history of "popular Enlightenment" (or the lack thereof) documents the attempts of a still heavily rural and locality-dependent teaching corps to "emancipate" itself—ironically by making itself a free profession whose privileges were recognized and protected by the central state. That liberals could not quite bring themselves to support this leap in status and pay for teachers of rural and lower-class students says much about the limits of German liberalism of the period. In the final chapters, too, we witness the opening of the gap between those who were able to go on to teach at the higher secondary schools, where teachers' credentials were valued, and the demoralized and severely underpaid elementary-level schoolteachers, whose ranks would, eventually and predictably, become increasingly feminized during the decades to follow.

*Prussian Schoolteachers* dealt extensively with the genesis of a concept that would be crucial in the next stage of Tony's work: *Beruf*, or calling. In Tony's interpretation, *Beruf* was not an innocent but an idealized term: what one wanted one's job to *seem*, regardless of the actual content or form of the "call" God had issued. In *Grace, Talent, and Merit*, on the other hand, *Beruf* is the term internalized and secularized by a generation and more of mid-eighteenth-century "poor students," men desperate to obtain freedom from dependency (on their families, local notables, or the churches) without pursuing a utilitarian career. Tony did not see himself abandoning social history, but instead as moving in the direction of the social history of ideas, in the tradition of the historical sociology of knowledge. The first section of the book is still concerned with Prussian social history; there are tables and telling statistics. But now there is another element: Tony uses a handful of rich student memoirs and novels to characterize the subjective experience of poverty, dependency, and the longing to live the life of the mind, free from the vagaries of aristocratic patronage and filial obligations to stay at home and do something useful for the family. Drawing on an extensive body of sermons and clerical publications, he assesses the importance of the Pietist movement, bent on completing and universalizing the Reformation, in transforming *Beruf* into something that was no longer limited to duty to God, but now "required an intensely self-disciplined, never-waste-a-minute, almost feverish activity in a lifelong occupation or office."<sup>3</sup> The command to

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony La Vopa, *Grace, Talent, and Merit: Poor Students, Clerical Careers, and Professional Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 143.

use one's gifts in the world made talent a kind of *Eigentum*, or "inward" property, and its deployment a necessity. In a world increasingly exposed to enlightened concepts, it became natural and virtuous for poor students to cultivate these "inner endowments," even against critics who saw in upward mobility the pursuit of individual ambitions and/or threats to the privileged hierarchies of the *Ständestaat*, and even in the face of a society that really wasn't sure it wanted birth and wealth replaced by talent and merit.

The book's first half, then, blends together social history and a new kind of cultural and literary history of the German Enlightenment, showing, too, that even when the concept of meritocracy received general approbation, this did not mean that everyone had an equal opportunity to succeed. Tony did not forget those peasant and working-class children, with no access to the Latin, and increasingly Greek, lessons one needed to join the ranks of the gifted. And in a spin-off essay on the professionalization of philologists, published in Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad Jarausch's *German Professions, 1800–1950*, he illustrated the way in which Hellenism, born as a protest against utilitarian pedagogy and dead-end theological careers, generated a neohumanist educational system that allowed cultivated individuals, with access to both Latin and Greek, to find "an occupational outlet for their creativity without having to internalize collective imperatives."<sup>4</sup> Those able to professionalize their fields—*Gymnasium* teachers and university professors—could be contented with a form of meritocracy that secured social status and promised aesthetic and academic, if not political, freedom for the limited few able to obtain the right forms of *Bildung*. This could, and did, offer the next generation of "poor students," especially clergymen's sons, some hope of rising in the ranks—but not much.

If the first half of *Grace, Talent, and Merit* is chiefly social history, however, part two is purely intellectual history, and intellectual history of a very profound and careful kind, based on the readings of clerical journals as well as letters, memoirs, and printed treatises. In a review in *Central European History*, R. Steven Turner particularly praised this section of the volume, which deals extensively with the origins and implications of the concept of *Bildung*. "To poor students," Turner summarizes,

*Bildung* offered deliverance not only from the stigma of the pedant, but also from the rationalist visions of the complex division of labor in a progressive society . . . The antinomy which had run through all of Enlightenment thought—whether virtue lay in service of the needs and conventions of society or in rejecting them in service of the natural

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony La Vopa, "Specialists against Specialization: Hellenism as Professional Ideology in German Classical Studies," in Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad Jarausch, eds., *German Professions, 1800–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 27–45, at 32–3.

man—was transcended in the concept of *Bildung* in what La Vopa aptly calls “the higher disinterestedness” of neohumanism.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, this section of the book offered a surgical probing of the ways in which the ideal of *Bildung* provided “self-discipline without self-denial, duty without coercion.”<sup>6</sup> *Bildung* transformed aristocratic or pedantic Latinity into the self-taxing, anti-utilitarian critical philology which defined the new service elite, and gave pastors the means to demonstrate that they were not just servants of the state, but legitimate and at least somewhat autonomous educators of human beings. The concept surely had its virtues, as Tony described, but in contrast to the (many) Humboldtian fans championing *Bildung* as a quasi-democratic concept, he showed that the concept also worked to sanction ambition and to produce exclusivity of a new kind. “La Vopa’s treatment must be recognized as one of the most profound discussions in the literature of the powerful and protean forces evoked by the concept of *Bildung*,” Turner concluded.<sup>7</sup> He was, and still is, right.

Tony’s final chapter in *Grace, Talent, and Merit* is devoted to J. G. Fichte, in many ways the epitome of the poor student on the make. La Vopa shows how Fichte’s peculiar conceptions of freedom and his vision of national community are related to the marginalization and dependence he suffered as an impecunious tutor employed by people he referred to as “stingy little *Krautjunker*,” as well as to Fichte’s enlightened conception of “natural” self-realization.<sup>8</sup> This chapter was clearly the bridge Tony crossed on the way to his next book, *Fichte: The Self, and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799*. Tony’s *Fichte* is more focused than either of his first two monographs, and an intellectual biography rather than a social or a cultural history. And yet in some ways it was a natural extension of the two, a study of a poor student embracing philosophy as a secularized *Beruf*. Tony has not forgotten the religious background vital to understanding even this most radical of late Enlightenment figures, and describes Fichte as “a product of the religious culture of German Lutheranism” in a fascinating (and still underappreciated) section on the theological origins of Fichte’s rationalism.<sup>9</sup> Yet there are new facets to his interpretation here, such as his attention to Fichte’s conception of marriage, which Tony describes as “rationalized gendered injustice.”<sup>10</sup> Some of the most memorable parts of the book describe the philosopher’s callous treatment of

<sup>5</sup> R. Steven Turner, “Of Social Control and Cultural Experience: Education in the Eighteenth Century,” *Central European History*, 21/3 (1988), 300–8, at 307.

<sup>6</sup> La Vopa, *Grace, Talent, and Merit*, 276.

<sup>7</sup> Turner, “Of Social Control,” 307.

<sup>8</sup> La Vopa, *Grace, Talent, and Merit*, 354, 383.

<sup>9</sup> See Anthony La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61–74.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

his long-suffering fiancée and then wife, Johanna Rahn, which make the adult Fichte's philosophical and personal self-absorption even more unpalatable. New too is Tony's interest in the discourse of publicity, and Fichte's relation to it, of which more below.

Perhaps most obviously, *Fichte* departs from the earlier works in its deep delving into biography as a means to explore not just the emergence of new social forms, but to contextualize the birth of the most abstract of philosophies. In the preface, Tony gives credit to his friend Suzanne Raitt and to the Biography Group at the National Humanities Center for giving him courage to attempt a contextual biography of this sort, in the face of most philosophers' disdain for the genre. In fact, it did take courage, as well as tremendous hard work, to piece together, for the first time, Fichte's (fragmentary) biography and his thinking on free trade, love, and "the public," all of which show the German philosopher to have held a series of views that were at once progressive and reactionary, original and borrowed, by turns fruitful or batty, crystal clear or just plain incomprehensible. Fichte, Tony demonstrated, could not be reduced to any of these adjectives, nor his inconsistencies waved off if we are to have an honest understanding of the philosophy of the German Enlightenment. Fichte would not be Fichte without (what we perceive to be) his warts.

Tony intended *Fichte* to be read by philosophers, but to for it to be so he had to defend this method, against that of the "rational reconstructionists" who simply extracted the bits they found to be useful and enduringly rational, and left the other stuff aside. In the introduction, he launches a telling assault on philosophers who launder their subjects, leaving behind pale shades of the flesh-and-blood thinkers. Tellingly, he concluded with an assault on Richard Rorty's claim that rational historical reconstruction is useful "if it is conducted in full awareness that it is an exercise in 'brisk Whiggery.'" For Tony, rational reconstruction itself, even with such a proviso, remains "an expression of profoundly condescending dismissiveness," one which presumes that contemporary philosophers need only use their predecessors as *spolia* with which to build their own, superior, temples of wisdom. On the contrary, Tony argues, contextual biography should "keep philosophy honest" by making it come to terms with forms of thinking "that are joltingly unfamiliar, that provoke self-doubt about one's own standards of rationality, or at least consternation that a past thinker, otherwise so rational by our standards, could be so apparently irrational on this or that subject."<sup>11</sup> Tony hoped that new, better conversations between historians and philosophers might emerge by way of such contextualizing jolts, but today he admits that such conversations have been few, and far between.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 19, 20.

In 2002, *Fichte* received the American Historical Association's George Mosse Prize for Cultural and Intellectual History, a well-deserved confirmation of the great importance of the book. But Tony was sick of *Fichte*—as one might well be—and already moving on to other pastures. There would be, he decided, no *Fichte: The Sequel*. For one thing, by this time Tony's Enlightenment had expanded well beyond German-speaking Europe. A full decade before the appearance of *Fichte* he had contributed a super-sized review essay on the Enlightenment and its publics to the *Journal of Modern History*. Treating the scholarship written as early as the 1950s (but more recently translated into English) and as late as the early 1990s, this essay has joined the ranks of a number of other *JMH* review essays which have become canonical, required reading for all students in the field. The aim of Tony's piece was to analyze the fate, and the continuing viability, of two major German interpretations of the Enlightenment which had received recent translations into English, Reinhart Koselleck's *Kritik und Krise: Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Freiburg: Karl Alder Verlag, 1959) and Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchung zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1962).

In this essay, Tony deployed both his historical and his philosophical skills to show how Koselleck's and Habermas's treatments of the historical dialectic of the public and the private failed, in different ways, to account for the many axes of universality and exclusiveness, openness and closure, operating in the very different contexts of Britain, France, and the German states. In charging Enlightened Masons (and other defenders of "private" criticism) with generating an antipolitical private sphere that was every bit as conducive to totalitarianism as the absolutism it opposed, Koselleck had too sharply segregated the absolutist "public sphere" and the private space of the lodges and the salons; plenty of government officials were also Masons. Habermas, Tony argued, vastly oversimplified relations between the public and the state (seeing the "public" as a concept articulated purely in opposition to the absolutist state), and the public and the marketplace (failing to appreciate attempts by the noncommercial, "professional" bourgeoisie to appeal to openness without actually letting everyone in). Both had ignored the important question of the inclusion or exclusion of women from new conceptions of "the public." Subsequent historical work on the Enlightenment—including the work of Robert Darnton, Keith Baker, Joan Landes, James van Horn Melton, Sara Maza, Daniel Roche, and so many others—had demonstrated, too, just how various the Enlightenment's publics had been, and how much the works of Koselleck and Habermas had been shaped by their own, presentist, concerns about leftist antipolitics (in the case of Koselleck) and the consumerist bourgeois public of the postwar era (in the case of Habermas). But, as always, Tony also generously acknowledged the daring and sweep of the two major works, and the need to



continue to explore the questions they posed, including the “tension between the Enlightenment’s commitment to openness and its impulses to closure” and the relationships between family, the public, and the market for print.<sup>12</sup>

Tony was similarly generous, but more trenchantly critical, in a review of the next grand synthesis of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Jonathan Israel’s *The Radical Enlightenment* (2001) and *Enlightenment Contested* (2009), the first two volumes of the trilogy that has now been completed with Israel’s *Democratic Enlightenment* (2013). In a 2009 review in the *Historical Journal*, Tony lauded Israel’s recovery of largely forgotten (and mostly Dutch) early eighteenth-century radicals and his demonstration of the cogency and power of their endorsements of secularism, egalitarianism, and human emancipation. But Israel’s attempt to apply his own tests to determine which thinkers could be counted “true” defenders of this single model of Enlightenment, to Tony’s mind, vexed the author’s ambitions to provide a *history* of the ideas of the period. Writing of *Enlightenment Contested*, Tony charged,

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 . . . The result is an exercise in presentism substituting for historical understanding, and an alarming one. If it were to be taken as a guidebook for a major new departure in Enlightenment studies, the field would be more impoverished than enriched.<sup>13</sup>

Israel’s picture of what modernity should be did not trouble Tony, nor did he take issue with Israel’s desire to stir up controversy. But in his attempt to bridge intellectual history and the history of philosophy, Israel had constructed a supposedly coherent package of Spinozist ideas that properly rational thinkers *should* have held, and made individuals’ success or failure in holding such ideas the litmus test as to whether or not they were the true bearers of Enlightenment. Instead of documenting the existence of such packages, Israel, according to Tony, often supposes that properly radical (and rational; there is a certain slippage of the terms) thinkers *must* have held them, and that the sheer force of their truth *must* have made them active in the world. Recognizing this approach as a species of not-so-brisk Whiggery, Tony objected to Israel’s Spinoza-centrism, but even more strongly to his treatment of moderate Enlighteners as failed thinkers, or hypocrites, or moral cowards. This seemed to him deeply unfair to figures such as Voltaire, Hume, or Locke, and to permit the dismissing of the great

<sup>12</sup> Anthony La Vopa, “Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *Journal of Modern History*, 64/1 (1992), 79–116, at 116.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony La Vopa, “A New Intellectual History? Jonathan Israel’s Enlightenment,” *Historical Journal*, 52/3 (2009), 717–38, at 719.

swathe of moderate and reformist thought—whose ubiquity and importance David J. Sorkin, for one, had recently demonstrated<sup>14</sup>—seemed a variety of false consciousness.

Of course, a commitment to rigorous historicization is not uncontroversial among intellectual historians, and Tony himself has always wanted to avoid the reduction of ideas purely to contextual causes. This, plus his Kantian attention to the moral dignity of the person, has always made him suspicious of discourse theory, which, in his view, “leaves little or no room for the purposeful agency of authors”<sup>15</sup>—or, Tony the philosopher might add, room for the Enlightened ideas whose truth-value we want to continue to defend, such as equality before the law. The need to transcend the supposed antinomy dividing rational reconstruction and full contextualization has been at the heart of Tony’s theoretical work at least since *Fichte*, and, as we have seen, was central to his rejection of Israel’s *Enlightenment Contested* as a model for a new intellectual history. He is keenly aware that the Enlightenment is a, perhaps *the*, place where truth-seeking philosophy and contextualizing history might meet, and the antinomy be overcome.

And this explains, I think, why Tony has increasingly described himself not as a German intellectual historian, but as an intellectual historian of the Enlightenment. This is to sail out from an already vast sea of primary and secondary literature into a limitless ocean; and to do so one requires a steady compass. But as Tony well knows from his fishing father, only in deeper waters can one catch the bigger fish.

Where Tony has increasingly looked to find a compass with which to navigate his Enlightenment ocean is to the field of gender studies. Already in an essay on “Kant’s Thinking about Marriage,” drafted as early as 1999 but published in 2006, Tony struggled with the problem of the usability of a major Enlightenment figure (Kant) for the advancing of philosophical feminism in the present. Admitting that there was no way around Kant’s expressed disgust with respect to even conjugal sex, La Vopa hesitated to dismiss the cynical and ascetic liberal entirely, who had, after all, appreciated the potential for dehumanization in sexual relations, and foreseen that sentimental views of marriage did not obviate the need for the protection of both parties’ rights.<sup>16</sup> A comparison of Kant’s views, and the much more essentialist and hyperpatriarchal views of his disciple, Fichte, demonstrated the need for us to recognize that dead white philosophers did hold different

<sup>14</sup> David J. Sorkin, *The Religion Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> La Vopa, “A New Intellectual History?,” 730.

<sup>16</sup> La Vopa, “Thinking about Marriage: Kant’s Liberalism and the Peculiar Morality of Conjugal Union,” *Journal of Modern History*, 77/1 (2005), 1–34, at 29.

views, and should not be dismissed (or rehabilitated) with the same wave of the “brisk Whig” wand. This essay was—like *Fichte*—another attempt to bridge the gap between the history of philosophy and intellectual history, and dealt seriously with the “severe tension” in Kant’s thought “between the animal needs of the embodied person and the respect due to the rational moral agent.”<sup>17</sup> But now at the heart of the question about the Enlightenment’s legacy for us was a question not about class, but about gender relations. The footnotes to the Kant essay showed deep reading and appreciation of feminist history, philosophy, and current political debates, in 2005 an appreciation still quite unusual for male (or female) intellectual historians of his generation.

I knew at the time—because he told me—but perhaps did not fully appreciate before the rereadings for this essay—was just how transformative Tony found the reviewing of Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott’s massive, watershed volume *Women, Gender, and the Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). It was in this book that he saw scholars, many of them literary specialists, fighting free from a form of presentist feminism that imposed its own yardstick on the past: those who counted as proto-feminists, in the early days of women’s history, *had* to be secular, *had* to champion political rights and freedoms for women, *had* to believe in the full equality of the genders, and so forth. Only those for whom all of our boxes could be ticked would count as women who got it “right” (there are clear parallels here to Israel’s expectations for what counts as properly enlightened). Of course, many scholars—women and men—had complained about such distortions before, but to find so many writers, and most of them feminists themselves, take apart this solipsism proved profoundly cheering, and provocative, as Tony began to plan the next stages of his work.

What Tony found remarkable was that the authors—or at least many of them—acknowledged that seeking feminist heroes with our values in the eighteenth century was a fool’s errand. Much better to understand how women operated within their worlds, in pursuit of aims that made sense to them. In his lengthy review of Taylor and Knott’s volume for the *JMH*,<sup>18</sup> Tony marveled at the findings of Phyllis Mack, who showed how Quaker women were led by their very anti-Enlightened faith in self-emptying to defy gender conventions in pursuit of social reforms; the duty to obey God, he learned from Mack, can activate women to defy social norms as well as to subordinate themselves to (male) authorities. He praised Norma Clarke’s non-heroic revelations about the Bluestockings—that they pursued gender-blind self-realization only for exceptional women like themselves. And he found persuasive Suzanne Desan’s demonstration that

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony La Vopa, “Women, Gender, and the Enlightenment: A Historical Turn,” *Journal of Modern History*, 80/2 (2008), 332–57.

the abstract universalism of the French republicans, at least in the marriage legislation of 1792, was not a covert bid to reconstitute male hegemony, though he insisted that there is still reason to see in at least some strains of revolutionary republicanism the assertion of a masculinist agenda. Tony appreciated, too, direct confirmation that one did not need to assume that all men held equally misogynist conceptions. Tony also praised Sieg Stuurman's essay and book on Poulain de la Barre,<sup>19</sup> and this figure has continued to stand for him as a demonstration that it was possible for man of the Grand Siècle—a French Cartesian priest turned Protestant exile—to conceive of equality between the sexes. The essay ends with a complicated posing of a difficult problem, very like the one posed by Jonathan Israel's work for the Enlightenment as a whole: can such a historicized and broadened conception of women and the Enlightenment serve as a basis for effective feminist activism today? La Vopa's answer is a bit cryptic, but if I read him correctly the answer is: maybe not, if one's political goals are to measure women seeking emancipation in the past on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the present ideal-typical feminist; but maybe so, if the goal is a civic polity in which different forms of living out the concept of gender equality can be embraced.

I realize that I have foxed the chronology here, and treated the 2008 review of *Women, Gender, and the Enlightenment* after the 2009 review of *Radical Enlightenment*; I don't think the latter essay would have been so trenchant if not for the thinking put into the essay on women and the Enlightenment the previous year. But I have put these essays in reverse order to highlight the coming to the fore of the issue of gender in Tony's work, which is unmistakable in recent years. In the manuscript Tony is now finishing, gender issues are front and center—though the main subject is masculinity, rather than feminism. As I have read most of the chapters in draft form, I am able to offer here a brief preview of the book's style and contents. Though I emphasize that my readings are based on the draft chapters, it seems to me impossible to complete a survey of Tony's career without a discussion of this volume, on which he has been working for some time, and which marks a set of new departures.

Most obviously, this book, tentatively titled "The Manly Mind and the Specter of Effeminacy in Enlightenment Cultures," departs from Tony's earlier work by being entirely devoted to major figures of the English, Scottish, and French, rather than the German, Enlightenments. The style, too, is different. Here—apart from a densely argued introduction—Tony's erudition is worn more lightly, and the prose is more literary than densely philosophical, as in *Fichte*, or *Grace, Talent, and Merit*. The book ranges backward into the seventeenth century, and ends before the Revolution in its quest to understand the sources of modern gender

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<sup>19</sup> Siep Stuurman, *François Polain de la Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

differentiation—and quests to overcome it. Tony makes no claim to coverage, but selects a fascinating array of figures to profile, creating a kind of string of pearls that stretches from Guez de Balzac to Diderot, taking in Poulain, Hume, Malebranche, Suzanne Necker, Louise d’Epinay, and the third Earl of Shaftesbury. Each of the chapters explores the way in which these figures lived their concepts, and especially their concepts of intelligence and manliness. Texts (published and private), reported conversations, and actions, such as the joining of a salon or the cutting off of a correspondence, are treated as ways of performing the self, and Tony never forgets that choices in the modes of these performances were socially bounded, for women more than for men. Though the rules of interaction were more or less internalized, he argues, “there is room in individuals’ subjectivity to acquire a critical distance on them. People can, of course, adjust their performances to different contexts, and can move from one to another.” Again we see a stepping away from discourse theory, but also a strong historicizing impulse, which leads him into disagreement with both feminists and historians of philosophy who would like to dispense with the historical situatedness of Enlightened figures, and simply drag them into narratives useful for the readers of today.

The problem of labor made a brief appearance in Tony’s “Women, Gender, and the Enlightenment” review. In “Manly Minds” this becomes a central concern, linked together with its opposite within Old Regime and especially French culture, *aisance*. Aristocratic women, he notes, were not supposed to work hard at anything, including their educations, lest they be seen as careerists, pedants, or narrow-minded pursuers of some specialized field. “The very claim to social exclusiveness and cultural preeminence,” he writes, “rested on the assumption that the critical freedom—the one that distinguished a small elite by perching it above the dictates of physical necessity—was freedom from labor.”<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, the young Tony keenly understood the subject position of the indigent student; but here, by way of a different conceptualization of labor, a new understanding of the contradictions implicit in the *aristocracy’s* performance of intelligence emerges. The association of women with *aisance* shaped an ideal female intelligence as dialogic, personal, and unpedantic—but also as unlabored and, potentially, unserious. Some women could turn this to their benefit, especially before the end of the eighteenth century, with its upgrading of both nature and serious conversation. But, of course, they had to cultivate, or at least perform, a kind of intelligence that did not involve concerted study, or carry the whiff of masculine ambition (there are interesting resonances here of the displacement of lower-class ambition discussed in *Grace, Talent, and Merit*).

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 341.

Correspondingly, he finds in aristocratic culture of *aisance* the framework proper to appreciate the agonies of Shaftesbury and Malebranche, men tormented by their physical weaknesses and “feminine” turns of mind, and able to reassert their masculinity only by virtuoso performances of Stoicism and by the writing of prose entirely purged of emotion. Today, one could almost read “humanities” (now increasingly feminized) and “engineering” (where men are massively dominant) into this formula. We are all—women as well as men, humanists and scientists—still living in the long shadows of these gendered expectations of the ways in which smart people should think, and live.

The historiographical object of “Manly Minds,” says its author, is to force intellectual historians to put gender at the heart of their considerations. We have much to learn from feminist philosophy and from literary studies, which have been left too much at the margins of our inquiries. By putting gender issues at the heart of our very discussions of what intelligence *is* (or was), Tony argues, we will understand in a much richer way what it was like to experience Parisian high society, or English gentlemanly milieus, or what Hume called the Middle Station, the educated professional circles of Edinburgh and other Scottish cities. We can come closer to understanding the norms that configured discursive practice, making men who ran in “polite” circles fearful of being stigmatized as effeminate, or women who worked too hard at their studies terrified of being classed as man-like freaks of nature. But we can also see how real men and women, thanks to interaction with one another, also sometimes transgressed these norms, inwardly or outwardly. Chapter by chapter, one appreciates figures we know chiefly as thinkers instead as situated interlocutors with members of the other sex. The book as a whole challenges us to go on with the conversation, even in the teeth of social prejudices and our own misunderstandings, as this is the only way for us to appreciate how social norms act on other people. We are not the only, but just the latest, generation to need conversations and friendships to help us understand ourselves and our limitations.

To write a book like “Manly Minds” has posed immense challenges, and not just because Tony’s health concerns in recent years have severely limited his working hours. How does one reconstruct conversations? How to get to the heart of friendships? The answer, for Tony, has meant extensive reading of the memoirs and letters of the central and minor figures involved, following the trail of philosophizing Swiss doctors and Parisian society lions turned Trappist monks. It has also entailed, of course, the careful rereading of “big” texts in the context of the private and ancillary documents, in order to understand the ways in which his writers lived and performed their claims. Tony credits his reading in literary studies for his new insights, particularly Bendetta Craveri’s *The Age of Conversation* (trans. Teresa Waugh (New York: New York Review Books, 2005)), and the work of his friends Barbara Taylor and the late Susan Manning. He has

relied, too, on the work of other intellectual and cultural historians, particularly Joan Scott, Silvia Sebastiani, Gerald Izenberg, Emma Rothschild, and Jerrold Seigel, all of them also old friends and correspondents. In many ways, this book enacts his conversations, with the Enlightenment, and with the people of the present, combining rigorous historical scholarship with the desire to engage current subjects, and reach across disciplinary divides.

If I were to seek some red threads across this rich corpus of La Vopiana, I would certainly point to the question of the Enlightenment's legacy first and foremost, and Tony's ever-ambivalent view of it. Already in his first, social histories, one of the underlying questions was, how meritocratic was the form of meritocracy the eighteenth century gave us? How were its radically democratic initiatives tamed or thwarted, making for concepts of *Bildung* that by the nineteenth century were really only serving the interests of a certain sector of the middle class? And then, in works following *Grace, Talent, and Merit*, a concern about "brisk Whiggery," something that posed a deep danger both to conversations between the philosophy of history and intellectual historians, and to contextualizing historians of the Enlightenment in particular. This was an issue Tony has felt called to address both for Enlightenment history as a whole and for feminist history in particular, insisting in both cases on rigorous historicism, as a means to have better, and more honest and self-critical, conversations. Having moved from social history to intellectual history, and from the study of German (male) philosophers to aristocratic Brits and French (female) authors, he has never forgotten to take stock of class, or to recognize the religious underpinnings of secular concepts, or to appreciate the way it felt to be treated as a dependent tutor, a poor student, a shunned woman. The lesson is: excavating the past fully is impossible, but uncovering its layers with the greatest care makes us more enlightened human beings, and wiser participants in conversations with our contemporaries.

Dedication to conversation, and to the principle that the job of the intellectual historian is to understand why even the wisest of philosophers (or most tedious of classical philologists) thought what they thought, is one of the things that cemented my friendship with Tony, and which underwrote his conception of what *Modern Intellectual History* should be. In founding *MIH*, Tony and Charlie Capper committed themselves to creating a journal which would be open to intellectual historians with specialties in European, US, and world history, as well as to cultural historians who wrote on noncanonical figures, institutional settings, and methods of communication. What one could not get away with was (1) an exclusively philosophical approach to, say, the ideas of Kant; (2) poor scholarship, writing, or argumentation; and (3) lack of respect for the ideas themselves. Some history of philosophy simply could not find a place here because it dispensed with context, and Tony (and the other editors) have worked tirelessly with authors

(including myself!) to make sure that no one gets away with offhanded dismissals of the ideas of Bossuet (as in Israel's work) or uninformed readings of Hegel. The journal has been a success because the founding editors made a commitment to high quality, and held authors to those standards, even when submissions were few or time pressure was great. The thousands of hours Tony gave to *MIH* (a sort of late surrogate, he once told me, for not having had Ph.D. students to teach at NC State) must be numbered as among his most valuable contributions to the profession, and to keeping intellectual history honest.

Tony's contributions to intellectual history, however, must be counted beyond his publications and journal issues, and in closing I want to return to the subjects of conversation, and friendship. Tony was educated in an age of tougher skins and more trenchant arguments; first there were the Jesuit fathers, and then the distinctly unfuzzy social historians at Boston College and Cornell. Tony remembers well being thoroughly raked over the coals by Lawrence Stone at Princeton's Davis Center—even though Lawrence actually liked Tony's work, and frequently invited him to his home for dinner.

These were different sorts of friendship than he has now, but Tony has always been able to disagree with an argument, and still love the arguer. He has decades-old friendships—and arguments—with people young and old, white and black, male and female, literary scholars and economic historians, who inhabit such divergent climes as Edinburgh, Budapest, Göttingen, Florence, Raleigh, Boston, and Baton Rouge. I have seen him make friends with German waitresses, and I know he has grown fond of attending youth boxing matches in Raleigh, in part to photograph the faces of the struggling young men, with whom he—the Bronx fisherman's son—feels a sort of empathetic solidarity. He regularly reads and edits the work of his conversation partners, and sometime does more; he painstakingly checked the translation from Italian to English of his friend Silvia Sebastiani's *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and took over, with Linda Andersson Burnett, the work for the copyediting of his beloved friend Susan Manning's *Poetics of Character: Transatlantic Encounters, 1700–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) after her untimely death. Recently he agreed to serve as the publicity manager for the sheriff's campaign run by an African American police officer he had met in the gym (regrettably, the candidate lost). Tony knows what it is to suffer—the painful early loss of his father, and his own bodily woes have taught him that—but he has become one of the profession's most committed advocates of stimulating conversation, and devoted practitioners of the art of friendship. And for that, especially, he deserves our thanks.