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Nathaniel Wolloch. *History and Nature in the Enlightenment.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2010. 300 pp. $124.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4094-2114-6; ISBN 978-1-4094-2115-3.

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Jenkins on Wolloch

The writing of history over the centuries demonstrates the evolution of our perceptions of Man's relationship with nature, a provocative idea examined in *History and Nature in the Enlightenment*, by Nathaniel Wolloch. In the ancient world, nature offered the possibility of response to human mastery; by the Middle Ages, the manifestations of nature were accepted as demonstrations of divine accommodation. During the Renaissance, both nature and God responded to Man's husbandry of the natural world. Nowadays, we seem to exist in an adversarial relationship with nature. According to numerous late-Enlightenment intellectuals, the first requirement for the development of civilization was for Man to learn how to control nature. Wolloch contends that this theme appears consistently and increasingly in eighteen-century culture, particularly to explain the shaping of philosophical, political, and religious characteristics of previous eras. Modern studies of the eighteenth century, Wolloch claims, have neglected this theme of the mastery and cultivation of nature as a prerequisite for social progression.

To the latter-eighteenth-century historian, human progress could be achieved only to the level that a people, group, or nation had set themselves in a superior position to nature. As nature responded to human endeavor, religious superstition receded before a more scientific approach to the natural world, though a morality capable of material and social progress would also recognize that mankind was subservient to a deistic sort of divine providence, one which did not pose a danger or a hindrance to progress. Wolloch points out that relatively few eighteenth-century thinkers espoused primitivism, or the idea that Man in a primitive state was superior to civilized Man. The Noble Savage could not have achieved happiness or harmony, since he lived in "rude" circumstances, having failed or neglected to achieve mastery over his environment through forest clearance, control of waterways, agriculture, or the domestication of plants or animals (p. 142). Such ventures required collaboration, and collaboration produced civilizations.

One theory, which Wolloch credits to the Scottish Enlightenment, argued that humanity progressed in stages, from hunting to herding to farming to trade in a four-stage version preferred by William Robertson, or vagrant versus sedentary in a two-stage interpretation favored by Edward Gibbon. This type of stadial theory was particularly useful in comparing primitive conditions, such as life in the wilds of America, to culturally advanced life in Europe. Nations that engaged heavily in commerce were considered the most advanced, though this level of achievement was accompanied by injustice, the acquisition of private property, and the subsequent need for laws.

Barbarians might have splendid qualities, such as bravery, and admirable values, such as loyalty, but unless they could exert mastery over their natural environments, they must always capitulate to superior cultures, which had achieved such domination of their surroundings. How, then, had Germanic barbarians toppled the Roman Empire? This question presented eighteenth-century scholars with a conundrum. For some, including Adam Smith, the answer lay in the chaos that ensued as the barbarians overran the empire, so that cultivation was disrupted and then neglected. The barbarians, once in control, had proven unequal to the realization of progress. Debauchery followed, commerce became disordered, superstition took hold, and all of this neglect and resulting poverty culminated in the Middle Ages, a period not admired by the Enlightenment's scholars.

Wolloch's consideration focuses upon the "Moderate" Enlightenment, and the author reminds the reader that moderate ideas were more prevalent during the period than the radical ideas that are more often highlighted. In doing so, he makes frequent use of Edward Gibbons's

works, including *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), calling Gibbon the "most philosophically typical" historian of the period, along with other prominent and lesser-known scholars (p. ix). Wolloch also includes among his sources a number of pre-Enlightenment works, however, arguing that these are the writings with which Enlightenment historians would have been familiar, so that an adequate understanding of the role played by the cultivation of nature in the era's historiographical literature requires some illumination of the sources available to those historians, including classical, medieval, and early modern works. The result is an extensive and wide-ranging bibliography that crosses the millennia.

History and Nature in the Enlightenment is divided into sections on "Cosmology," "Cultivation," "Rudeness," and "Barbarism Civilized." Wolloch's account is readable and stimulating, though the book's internal structure can be problematic. The author drops historians of various eras and ilks into the soup where they had something to say about a particular topic, but if the reader would like to know more about an individual example, he or she will have to look elsewhere. The volume does make an excellent historiographical counterpart to other works addressing the Enlightenment outlook on Man's relationship to nature, such as Jan Golinski's *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (2008), Peter Hans Reill's *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (2005), and Dorinda Outram's *Panorama of the Enlightenment* (2007).

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