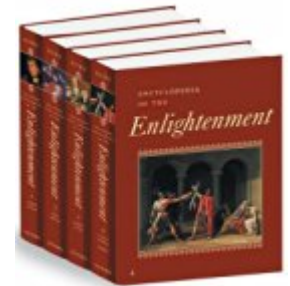


Alan Charles Kors, ed.. *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 1920 pp. \$495.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-510430-1.



Reviewed by Gerrit Voogt

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Reviewing a four-volume work of vast scope within the compass of a few pages is a daunting task, and finishing it was difficult, as this reviewer kept getting side-tracked into reading yet another interesting entry. The reader will, hopefully and mercifully, realize that a review can only give *pars pro toto*, a general scope with some examples.

In his preface, Alan Kors draws a parallel between this synthesizing endeavor and Denis Diderot's famous project, since both constitute an effort to put the finger on the pulse of the range and significance of current knowledge and understanding and the changes that have taken place in them. Despite obvious differences in scope, the comparison is apt, because a perennial and ongoing feature of "the" Enlightenment(s) is that definition is elusive. Thus, Norman Hampson wrote in the preface to his *The Enlightenment*: "Within limits, the Enlightenment was what one thinks it was," and Thomas Munck notes, in his conclusion of *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History*, that "[i]f the Enlightenment was anything, it was about exposing all inherited beliefs to reason

and open debate, and ultimately replacing passive acceptance with active participation." [1] Another feature is that the Enlightenment remains a hotly debated topic. Tacitus's dictum, advocating an approach to history *sine ira et studio*, is rarely observed.

A general point of critique could be a certain inconsistency of coverage. Some articles on certain disciplines and fields of study, e.g. the one on "Feminist Theory" (Anne K. Mellor, v. 2, pp. 39-44), briefly continue their discussion from the Enlightenment up to the present, whereas others restrict themselves to the eighteenth century. Furthermore, some disciplines--being a historian, I have to think of historiography--are missing as a separate entry (although a Vico receives ample individual attention). It also seems that painters, for example, are relatively underrepresented (with no entries for Houdon, Chardin, Watteau, etc.)

The conceptual framework behind the alphabetical ordering of the encyclopedia is well thought through. The operational categories and rubrics can be found in a useful and user-friendly "Topical Outline" (printed in the first and last vol-

umes), and cross-referencing is facilitated by references at the end of most articles, by blind entries as well as by the generally excellent index which takes up pages 295-471 of volume 4. Thus, although I knew Isabelle de Charrière primarily as "Belle van Zuylen" (and she is only entered under the former name, with no cross-reference or blind entry), I did find "Zuylen" in the index, which led me to Charrière.

On reading the article on "Scholarly Associations and Publications," I came across Thomasius (v. 4). Thomasius's biography in the same volume mentions the embrace, by this "founder of the German Enlightenment," of Pufendorf's natural law concept, and his view of sociability as the "basic principle of natural law." Looking further, I found, still in the same volume, the long and thorough entry on "Sociability" (v. 4, pp. 96-104), not mentioned in the cross-references at the end of the Thomasius article. Thinking of how I teach the Enlightenment and my usage, in this context, of the term *bienfaisance* (which I loosely translate as "benevolence"), I wondered if my students would also be able to find their way to sociability (since there is no entry on *bienfaisance*). And indeed, volume 1 contains a blind entry on *bienfaisance* that leads you to Sociability and Moral Philosophy.

At one point during my peregrinations through the encyclopedia, I remembered that, flipping through the volumes, a picture of the Laocoon statue had somewhere caught my eye. Wanting to find it again, I thought it must have been in the entry on Lessing, because of his famous essay on this sculpture. I looked under "Lessing," but failed to find it. Obviously, "Laocoon" would not be a separate entry. But a quick check of the index at the end of volume 4 led me to the long entry on Aesthetics in volume 1, and the above-mentioned picture (v. 1, p. 29). This is another example of the user-friendliness of the encyclopedia. One way or another, one usually finds what one is looking for.

The categories listed in the "Topical Outline" are: "Definitions and Interpretations of the En-

lightenment," "The Political Geography of the Enlightenment," "Agencies and Spaces of the Enlightenment," and "Enlightenment Thought and Eighteenth-Century Culture." A survey of the "Topical Outline" makes clear that the greatest number of entries in the encyclopedia are biographical: the listing of these entries comprises about half of the entire outline. Biographical entries are, however, comparatively short, whereas ample space is granted to themes such as "Economic Thought" (v. 1, pp. 371-379), "Literacy" (v. 2, pp. 413-418), "Revealed Religion" (v. 3, pp. 441-450), or "Technology" (v. 4, pp. 150-154).

In some cases, based on the category names in the "Topical Outline," it is hard to know what to expect. Thus, under the generic heading of "Political Geography," and its sub-heading "Nations, States, and Politics," you find "Aristocracy" and "Bourgeoisie"; another sub-heading here is "Demography," containing a few entries relating to social history.

In order to give a more thorough idea of the approach and scope of what this encyclopedia has to offer, I will discuss in some detail the first category of the "Topical Outline" ("Definitions and Interpretations of the Enlightenment"), which offers a useful starting point and an *-tat de question* for anyone engaging in Enlightenment studies. The lead article, "Enlightenment Studies" (v. 1, pp. 418-430) by Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, presents a historiographical essay that gives almost equal time to supporters and critics of the Enlightenment. The "supporting articles" listed in the "Topical Outline" are not quite the same as the ones named at the end of the article itself. Both authors mention Ernst Cassirer, Feminist Theory, Michel Foucault, Frankfurt School, Peter Gay, Paul Hazard, Reinhart Koselleck, and Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism. But in addition, the article lists the French Revolution, Philosophes, and Romanticism; and the "Topical Outline" lists Jürgen Habermas and Scholarly Associations and Publications. Furthermore, an article that should

have been referenced but is not is Counter-Enlightenment, for controversies in the eighteenth century regarding the Enlightenment take up an important part of Jacob and Hunt's article as well (v. 1, pp. 418-421).

The article by Hunt and Jacob seesaws between philosophes and their critics, dividing the debate into four chronological sections: controversies on the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century; the "campaign" against the Enlightenment project after the French Revolution, and the concurrent gradual eclipse of Enlightenment studies; the revival of interest in the Enlightenment after c. 1870, which the authors link with the rise of mass politics in France's Third Republic; and the twentieth-century debates ignited by fascism, post-structuralism, and feminism, and generally focused on the relation between the Enlightenment and modernity.

For the first period, the authors trace the first use of the term "Enlightenment" (v. 1, p. 418) and highlight the philosophes' focus on "reform based on reason." Kors's article on "Philosophes" (v. 3, pp. 267-273) further enhances our outline of what defines the Enlightenment. He characterizes a philosophe as "a thinker who possessed a critical spirit informed by the intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century, above all in its empirical and practical modes" (v. 3, pp. 267-268). But Kors moves beyond a mere definition of the term, and discusses case studies and examples. He discusses Marmontel's novel *Blisaire* (1767), in particular chapter 15, on tolerance. ("Toleration" has a hefty entry by Gordon Schochet in the encyclopedia, v. 4, pp. 165-170.) Tolerance emerged as the central issue, the litmus test almost, that defined the philosophes. An inconsistency in the article is that at one point Kors makes clear that conflict with the church and anticlericalism are primarily typical of the French Enlightenment, yet later he appears to generalize the term (e.g., p. 269, top: "Anticlericalism was the most common denominator of the Enlightenment"). The article is a good start-

ing point for a determination of the philosophes' self-image; Peter Gay's use of the term *le petit troupeau*, though not mentioned here, seems apt for the kind of defensive banding together of the philosophes here described.

Hunt and Jacob next move to the attack coming from Jansenists, Jesuits, and the Sorbonne, on what the latter regarded as the philosophes' materialism, with, of course, as a crucial *caesura* for the critics the year 1758, when Helvetius's *De l'esprit* was published. It was in the same year that Chaumeix launched his multi-volume attack, *Pr=jug=s l=gitimes contre l'Encyclop=die, 1758-59*. Censorship, the attack on Freemasonry, Herder's critique: these can all be further examined in separate articles.

During the second period, the French Revolution disqualified the Enlightenment in many eyes, with some starting to make the distinction between the respectable and the disreputable radical Enlightenment. It brought on the Restoration critique. Critics such as Edmund Burke, Chateaubriand, and De Maistre receive separate entries, while other opponents, such as Carlyle or Treitschke, do not; but it is understandable that choices must be made due to space constraints. The forces of Romanticism and nationalism, militating against interest in or respect for the Enlightenment, are reviewed.

Gambetta set the tone for the Third Republic and for the third period in Hunt and Jacob's account, by declaring, upon the republic's inception in 1871, "that republicans intended 'to derive the political and social system from the idea of reason rather than grace'" (quoted v. 1, p. 425). But in England (although I would add: certainly not only there!) Charles Darwin, with Erasmus Darwin as a grandfather and with his Unitarian mother a literal child of the Enlightenment, provoked much opposition. Among Marxists the Enlightenment encountered a mixed reception.

In the twentieth century, the Enlightenment of course was fascism's *bete noire*, and conversely

it was the rallying point for some as "the common Western foundation of freedom and democracy" (v. 1, p. 427). Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) had to flee Germany shortly after publication of his still widely used *Philosophie der Aufklärung* (1932). The encyclopedia does justice to this pivotal work in a separate entry by Daniel Gordon (v. 1, pp. 207-210). Cassirer's book had a wider geographical range than was common heretofore. Cassirer regarded the Enlightenment's move away from metaphysics (from the *esprit de système* to an *esprit systématique*) as a positive thing, and examined more "disciplines" in his analysis (such as esthetics, or history) than was heretofore customary. Gordon shows the importance of the work by listing some of its reviewers over the years (Meinecke, Isaiah Berlin), and summarizes the main points of critique, such as Cassirer's disregard for the Enlightenment's social and institutional setting (v. 1, p. 210). Similar critique has been made of Paul Hazard's works, but these also have attained the status of classics (*La crise de la conscience* [1935], *La pensée européenne* [1944]). Then, in the 1960s, Peter Gay's great synthesizing work celebrated the Enlightenment as "the foundation for modern secular values" (v. 1, p. 429). Gordon, who also wrote the balanced article on Gay (v. 2, pp. 102-105), recounts Gay's critique of Carl Becker (who saw in the Enlightenment just another form of disguised myth-making), and his admiration for Voltaire (despite Voltaire's anti-Jewish animus). Gordon detects a weak spot in Gay's inability to adequately square his thesis of the Enlightenment as essentially a movement premised on strict empiricism with the philosophes' often-professed belief in natural law. However, Gordon fails to mention Gay's often criticized over-emphasis of France in this work.

An angle of criticism of the Enlightenment diametrically opposed, it seems, to the fascist critique came from Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno of the Frankfurter Schule, who see a logical connection between the Enlightenment and fascism. This charge, that the Enlightenment

led to (totalitarian) control, also underlies the postmodern and feminist critiques. Michel Foucault subtly reversed the Enlightenment epistemology, claiming that "rather than knowledge conferring power and hence freedom, 'we should ... admit that power produces knowledge.... The subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge" (quoted in v. 1, p. 429). A merit of James Miller's entry on Foucault is that he also indicates Foucault's preoccupation with the Enlightenment and in particular with Kant, in whose tradition he stood with his own idea of freedom (v. 2, pp. 58-60).

Gordon's contributions relating to this phase of Enlightenment studies and critique are all of great quality and thoroughness. His entry on "Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism" (v. 3, pp. 341-346) does justice to the topic, and at the same time offers an incisive and thoughtful, mostly implicit, critique of the assumptions and attitudes of poststructuralists and postmodernists. For the latter, the Enlightenment is of course central, for it represents the "modern" they criticize and the "structure" they aim to deconstruct (v. 3, pp. 341-342). One point of critique for Gordon is that postmodern critics are often overly selective in their critique: e.g., Derrida attacks Rousseau, and somehow wants to make him typical of the entire Enlightenment, but it is unrealistic to present one or two authors as emblematic of "the" Enlightenment. Thinkers such as David Hume themselves criticized reliance on reason, and saw themselves as "post-rationalists." "The Enlightenment," Gordon concludes, far from being the antithesis of post-modernism, may actually be one of its sources" (v. 3, p. 346).

The attacks on the Encyclopedistes, Jacob and Hunt conclude in the *apologia* that ends their survey of Enlightenment Studies, prove how central the Enlightenment is to the concept of Western modernity. Since Gay's work no new (positive)

synthesis has appeared, except by the Enlightenment's debunkers. This naturally has much to do with specialization, but they express the hope that this encyclopedia will stimulate renewed efforts at reassessing "the significance of one of history's defining moments" (v. 1, p. 430).

This overview of one category (the shortest) in the "Topical Outline" will hopefully convey to the reader of this review an idea of the breadth and quality of the encyclopedia, whose articles are generally of good caliber and often highly readable and provided with a useful bibliography (often separated into primary and secondary sources). The entire analysis in "Enlightenment Studies" is based on the back and forth between protagonists and debunkers. The authors cannot be unaware that the historian's aim is still to transcend partisanship and to try to approximate "truth," as they themselves explained so well (together with Joyce Appleby) in *Telling the Truth about History*. It should, in the end, matter little if you are for or against, and that there was an Enlightenment is not *im Frage*, so it needs to be analyzed and defined.

The related entry on "Scholarly Associations and Publications" by James Schmidt (v. 4, pp. 28-33) is useful, as it does not only list major associations, but also notes the development of Enlightenment studies and the challenges they face or have faced, as well as (again) problems of definition. One challenge he notes is, e.g., the preponderance of literature in the study of the British and American Enlightenment. There is no mention, here or elsewhere, of online associations (such as H-France) or links to important online publications of primary texts.

In sum, this new encyclopedia has much to offer in its breadth and scope, as well as in the high quality of its contributors, and it belongs on the shelves of any self-respecting institute of learning.

Note

[1]. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Thomas

Munck, *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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