William J. Bulman and Robert G. Ingram, eds.

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This insightful, and in many places highly original, collection of essays sets its sights on a bold project. In the words of William J. Bulman, author of the volume's introduction, *God in the Enlightenment* attempts "to construct a compelling, accurate, and less ideologically loaded account of the Enlightenment" (4) capable of addressing diverse controversies associated with Enlightenment scholarship at a time when, as Bulman asserts, "the 'Enlightenment project' still serves as a cornerstone of both liberal self-understanding and anti-liberal and anti-secularist critique" (2). This enterprise is a tall order for an edited volume, but thanks in part to a remarkable degree of coherence and complementarity among the contributions themselves—as well as an expansive and timely historiographical introduction by Bulman and an erudite conclusion by Dale K. Van Kley—this edited volume succeeds admirably, and must be counted among the most significant of recent works on the Enlightenment era. As Bulman's introduction insists, popular as well as scholarly arguments about the nature of the age of reason (as it has often been called) have become ensnared within the "false dilemma" of "either defend[ing] or condemn[ing] philosophically articulated secular liberalism" (14). The only way out of this false consciousness, Bulman suggests, is "to alter the terms of the broader discussion" by attempting a new synthetic definition of the Enlightenment capable of cutting through the fragmented scholarship about it (14). Bulman, by his own admission, does not fully define just what form this new synthesis of Enlightenment scholarship will take, but he and his contributors do an excellent job at charting its possible course.

In contrast to Paul Hazard and more recently, Jonathan I. Israel, Bulman's collection considers the early Enlightenment c.1650–80 not as a moment of "radical departure," but rather as the culmination of a longer "holistic process" unleashed by the globalization of Renaissance erudition on the one hand, and the theological polemics of the sixteenth-century confessional crises on the other (14–17). In short, as Bulman insightfully notes, the "[i]ncessant wrangling over the contents of the Bible, ubiquitous attacks on religious error, and increasing recourse to late humanist techniques—all of which activity was overwhelmingly pious in motivation—conspired to initiate a series of profound transformations that unwittingly took Europe away from the age of Renaissance and Reformation" (16–17). Thus, although the Jesuits do not feature prominently within the pages of this edited volume, Bulman's own interpretive framework will undoubtedly be of great interest to scholars and students of

Jesuit history precisely because Jesuits played such a prominent role in what Bulman considers to be the “two most important guiding conditions” for the gradual development of the Enlightenment: sixteenth- and seventeenth-century confessional polemics and the increasingly global reach of European humanist erudition (18–19).

The brief scope of this book review makes it impossible to fully and critically engage with, and thereby render full justice to, the richness and nuance of each inspiring contribution to this volume. But a brief synopsis of each chapter will serve as sufficient enticement to interested researchers. Justin Champion's contribution seeks to counter the tendency to relegate Thomas Hobbes to the margins of the Enlightenment because of the authoritarian implications of his arguments in *Leviathan*, insisting instead that Hobbesian Enlightenment derived from Hobbes's fear of the damaging effects of religious violence to the civil peace of early Modern European societies. In response to religious war, Champion insists, Hobbes “neutered the divine as a transcendent source for political and moral authority” (42–62, here 43). Anton M. Matytsin's chapter argues that French Catholic and Protestant apologists confronted the more radical excesses of Enlightenment naturalism, atheism, and skepticism by developing remarkably similar arguments for the reasonability and social utility of Christianity. Of particular interest to scholars of the Jesuits is Claudia Brosseder's fascinating study of Barnabé Cobo's *Historia del nuevo mundo* (1646–53). Brosseder argues that a distinctive and understudied “Peruvian Enlightenment” derived from the Creole intellectual elite of the seventeenth century, and included the work of some Jesuit scholars like Barnabé Cobo who applied Renaissance techniques to the fruits of Peruvian civilization (particularly Peruvian religion). Cobo did this, according to Brosseder, in a self-conscious attempt to study, and thereby re-valorize, indigenous American culture on its own terms separate from the colonial framework afforded by Spanish scholarship. Similarly remarkable is the Joan-Pau Rubiés chapter on the emergence of libertine interpretations of Hinduism; whereas, Paul H.C. Lim's chapter entitled, “The Platonic Captivity of Primitive Christianity,” contends that much of what passes for libertine or anti-religious polemics in early modern Britain should be reframed as the originally unforeseen consequence of Protestant-inspired quests for a more purely reformed Christianity.

Lim's essay is followed by Jetze Touber's truly fascinating analysis of the diverse ways in which Spinoza's biblical criticism was received by participants in theological disputes among Dutch Reformed clergy. Following Touber's, is Jonathan Sheehan's thoughtful chapter focusing on eighteenth-century treatments of the Book of Job which, he argues, suggests that the Enlightenment pursued different modes of theological questioning as distinct from any

uniformly secularizing agenda. Sheehan insightfully maintains that the most salient characteristic of Enlightenment theological reasoning was the manner in which it occurred without “the oversight of confessional communities” in a milieu in which no authority (secular or sacred) could any longer enforce its claim to sovereign authority over theological argument (182–200, here 183–84). Brad S. Gregory’s chapter on the “Reformation Origins of the Enlightenment’s God,” in some measure, offers a long-range etiology of the contextual conditions under which Sheehan’s notion of Enlightenment theological debate attained. Gregory’s chapter offers compelling food for thought, especially in so far as he concludes that philosophical discussion was the only common basis for theological dispute across the Protestant and Catholic divide by the eighteenth century, and this inadvertently made the elevation of human reason inevitable. J.C.D. Clarke’s chapter is in many respects the counterpoint of the volume because it contends that English debates about the nature of God were so thoroughly rooted in earlier “Anglophone” theological discourses as to be totally unrelated to anything that might be considered “the Enlightenment” or proto-secular. H.C. Erik Midelfort examines medical responses to outbursts of religious enthusiasm among some German Pietists, thereby concluding that contemporary medicine continued to mix natural and supernatural—secular and religious—explanations for ecstatic phenomena. Sarah Ellen Zweig’s chapter then fills in a surprising omission in the evolving historiography of eighteenth-century materialism and its relationship to the vitalist tradition by studying the manner in which passages in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* were taken by Richard Bentley to suggest that its author “was a furtive Spinozist” who, like John Toland, was engaged in the fusion of Renaissance hermeticism with Spinozan materialism (257–77). The volume reaches an elegant conclusion with the wide-ranging excursus of Dale K. Van Kley into the “Varieties of Enlightened Experience” which, under the banner of an extended metaphor borrowed from William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*, makes a similar case that “Enlightenment” is perhaps best understood as a broad spectrum of often quite different contemporary experiences of philosophical modalities, and only after a long and complex cultural process did “[u]nbelief [take] its place as an option along with other forms of enlightenment and belief” (278–316, here 310).

Remarkably little can be said by way of criticism of such an ambitious volume, and even if at times individual essays leave the reader zealous for more detail or greater clarity about specific points, this is hardly surprising given this collection’s ambitious scope. In fact, in so far as these essays spark further scholarly conversation and research, they are all still remarkably successful. Jonathan Sheehan’s chapter possesses a bold and potentially very useful

reframing of the question of God and the Enlightenment, but it would have benefitted from a sharper argument and less impressionistic conclusion. Anton M. Matytsin's contribution is a remarkably comprehensive and well-crafted chapter, but it leaves the reader wishing Matytsin had focused more concertedly upon the most original part of his own argument: the convergence between Huguenot and Catholic apologetical strategies used "against atheists and religious skeptics" (64). Paul C.H. Lim's contribution on Stephen Nye and Jacques Souverain begins with a thought-provoking thesis purporting to examine the anti-Platonic dimensions of Enlightenment Biblical criticism, but the author's prose frequently obscures this thesis as the chapter's narrative heavily bears the burden of its own intricacies and erudition. Additionally, some readers will certainly question Brad Gregory's overly deterministic conclusion that "the Enlightenment discourse about God was shaped in determinative ways by late medieval intellectual assumptions and the doctrinal disagreements of the Reformation era" (212). Similarly, J.C.D. Clarke's chapter seems overly hasty in its zeal to exempt Anglophone theological discussion about God from an Enlightenment which he still seems to elide rather casually only with secularization. Indeed, this is one of the very elisions problematized by Bulman's and Ingram's volume as a whole. Finally, although Bulman's attempt to connect scholarly debates over the Enlightenment with the ways in which contemporary politicians, pundits, and critics speak of it is admirable and novel, this connection might still have been made (at least in the introduction) with greater rhetorical nuance. In the midst of the second paragraph, for example, Bulman provocatively writes, "Many secularist liberals persist in their efforts to eradicate God from the public square and other prized institutional contexts" while "[c]ritics of liberalism and liberal democracies have, in turn, declared them morally bankrupt, socially entropic, and hypocritically persecutory" (1). This claim about "secularist liberals" attempting to "eradicate God from the public square" is wildly exaggerated and one wonders why it (and other statements like it) appear with some frequency throughout the beginning of the introduction. These rhetorical slips are particularly jarring since the originality and precision of Bulman's own historiographical introduction otherwise speaks for itself, and his argument would have functioned undiminished without such potentially loaded strawmen portrayals of "secularist liberals" or their "anti-secularist" critics. It is, to be fair, possible that Bulman was here assuming the rhetorical mantle of the very foundational assumptions his introduction very effectively complicates.

Nevertheless, and very much because of the volume's successes and the stylistic and interpretive issues it raises, each contribution to *God in the Enlightenment* advances our understanding of the period by sparking further debate

about, and investigation into, what in France was known to contemporaries as the *siècle de lumières* (century of lights). This important edited volume depicts the Enlightenment as a diverse constellation of reform programs that had, among their origins, theological controversies of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and as their consequences, seismic shifts in how Modern Europeans (and the societies shaped or disrupted by them) would eventually talk about God, faith, and religious expression.

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