

*The Enlightenment that Failed. Ideas, Revolution, and Democratic Defeat, 1748-1830.* By Jonathan Israel. Oxford University Press. 2019. ix+1080 pp.

A distinguished historian of the Dutch Republic, Jonathan Israel has spent over two decades devoting his prodigious intellectual abilities to a series of massive works on the Enlightenment, each published by Oxford University Press. *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (2001) was followed by *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (2006), and *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (2011). Each impressive assessments of a particular aspect of his thesis, they rest on a common proposition about the existence, coherence and significance of a 'Radical Enlightenment.' As Israel notes, in a conclusion that is instructive for its willingness to locate his work in controversy, his is not a thesis that enjoys majority support.

That itself is not a reason not to read this latest volume, but from my perspective, not as an historian of intellectual thought but, as a writer and teacher on eighteenth-century Europe (*Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 1990; second edition 1999), I do not find this corpus as I would like. There is a mass of relevant material and some wonderful quotations. The latest volume is particularly interesting in its discussion of the New World, and brings Simon Bolivar centrally into the story. There is also a highly effective assessment of developments in Haiti, and these are skilfully presented in terms of the complex tensions of political views and ethnic interests, in both Paris and Haiti.

All of this is much to the good but there are some serious problems as well. Methodological questions about the book are brought to the fore by Michael Bentley in his review in March 2020 issue of *The Critic*, notably the way in which Israel's 'Radical Enlightenment' turns it into an ontological presence while his focus on ideal types, and on both classification and teleology accordingly, is misleading. I would add that Israel appears less than happy in his understanding of the role of Christianity which continued to provide a context and means not only for devotion, but also for a wide range of intellectual strategies and means. Moreover, the contextual level of thought is much more varied at the national level than Israel, with his search for archetypes, permits. I have already argued that as a tendency, rather than a movement, the Enlightenment deserves more attention in terms of its diversity. The cosmopolitan nature of the Republic of Letters, and the similarity of metaphors such as *lumières* and Enlightenment, encouraged both contemporary and modern commentators to exaggerate the role of common traits and to underrate the importance of difference. And so also with what Israel, following Margaret Jacob, terms the 'Radical Enlightenment': his capitalisation. Radicalism was neither a simple nor a unitary phenomenon; while many statements he cites possibly can be understood as rhetorical devices. More, moreover, should have been made in this latest volume of the Freemasons, while I was surprised not to see more on the suspicions the

Illuminati engendered. Israel deserves much credit for his scholarship and for drawing attention to the controversial nature of his assessment. This reviewer remains unconvinced.

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