

Rembrandt's self-awareness or Dou's virtuosity precisely point to the greatness of these art works, a greatness which reveals itself in the variation and abundance of its seventeenth-century subjects as much as in the wealth of interpretations they have engendered in the centuries thereafter.

Jonathan I. Israel. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. xvi + 810 pp. + 23 plates. Review by MARK G. SPENCER, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

Jonathan I. Israel, like many scholars before him, argues that the Enlightenment is instrumental “for understanding the rise of the modern world”(vi). But the dimensions of Israel's Enlightenment are such that they differ in important respects from most modern interpretations. Israel aims to portray the “European Enlightenment as a single highly integrated intellectual and cultural movement”(v). His Enlightenment was not of a predominately French or English inspiration. It was not a movement played out on any one national stage but rather a drama whose cast was drawn from many countries, albeit centered on north-western Europe. The Enlightenment did, however, owe more to one country than modern scholars let on. The importance of Dutch thinkers to the Enlightenment is a theme Israel demonstrates here with encyclopedic thoroughness. Israel's view emerges, in part, by locating what historians know as the radical Enlightenment more firmly within the Enlightenment's mainstream current. The radical Enlightenment was, he writes, “an integral and vital part of the wider picture”(vi). Readers of this journal, in particular, may be interested to know that for Israel the late seventeenth century is the crucial period for understanding the origins and flavour of the European Enlightenment. Israel's perspective alters the dimensions of the Enlightenment in other important ways too, as we shall see.

This book has five parts. Part I is really an extended introduction. It defines a “general process of rationalization and secularization” which created a “Crisis of the European Mind,” a phrase Israel borrows from Paul Hazard’s classic account of European intellectual history in the early modern period. By the early seventeenth century, Israel argues, the confessional conflicts occasioned by the Reformation had yielded to a “stable and imposing façade of spiritual and intellectual unity”(16). But from within that stability developed a “contest between faith and incredulity”(4), what Israel later characterizes as “the escalating conflict between revealed religion and philosophical irreligion, the war between Christianity and the new heretics”(458). Israel traces how that crisis swept over western and central Europe after 1650. This radical shift was one inspired by élites, but evident to common people who debated its implications and felt its effects.

The central figure in Israel’s account is Benedict de Spinoza. Spinoza’s notion of “*libertas philosophandi*” (freedom of thought and speech), his doctrine that motion is inherent in matter, his infamous denial of Biblical miracles in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and his argument for the impossibility of the existence of devils in *Korte Verhandelin* all contributed in important ways to the radical Enlightenment. Spinoza’s writings helped create the very core of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Not least important were the implications of Spinoza’s thought for political philosophy, a topic on which Israel has much to offer. A central tenet of Israel’s argument is that “If the concept of the secular ‘common good’ intrinsic to radical thought and Spinozism is allowed to spread, then inevitable political and social revolution based on notions of the ‘general will’, and the call for equality, seemingly becomes inevitable”(80). In many respects this is a book that aims not only to illuminate ideas but also to demonstrate their power.

Along the way Israel pauses to make many interesting points on a variety of topics. Indeed, Israel has a wonderful ability to forage far and wide, discussing in context hundreds of sources typically far removed from the beaten path. He notes a shift in the aims of European censors in the years under review as they moved “away

from a theological focus to suppression of proscribed secular, 'philosophical' ideas"(104). Yet that changed emphasis did not stop censorship of books like Pietro Giannone's *Historia civile del regno di Napoli* (1723). Israel charts the contents of "universal libraries," discusses lexicological literature such as Bayle's *Dictionnaire* whose "influence was ubiquitous and could not be reversed"(137), and explains the growth of "erudite periodicals"(142). Journals in particular, such as *L'Europe Savante*, were important for disseminating debate inspired by the enlightened. "In an age when barriers of language and the vagaries of the book trade frequently impeded the circulation of books internationally, it was especially the journals which spread awareness of new discoveries, ideas, and controversies around Europe"(150) and "helped define the clandestine Radical Enlightenment"(155). While Israel is primarily concerned with intellectual history of a high order, this book shows a keen sense of the social history of ideas. That theme is explored in Thomas Munck's recent book *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History, 1721-1794* (London, 2000), a book which may not have been available to Israel before *Radical Enlightenment* went to press.

Parts II and III trace the origins, development, and principles of Spinoza's thought in more detail. They do so by placing Spinoza in the context of seventeenth-century Holland and within the milieu of Franciscus van den Enden, Adriaen and Johannes Koerbagh, Lodewijk Meyer, Johannes Bouwmeester, and other Dutch thinkers who are not often found in modern accounts of the Enlightenment. For Israel, however, at the very "core" of Spinoza's thought "stands the contention that 'nothing happens in Nature that does not follow from her laws, that her laws cover everything that is conceived even by the divine intellect, and that Nature observes a fixed and immutable order,' that is, that the same laws of motion, and laws of cause and effect, apply in all contexts and everywhere"(244).

Spinoza's thought was highly contested during his lifetime. Israel traces reactions to Spinoza's writings, arguing that they had "an appreciable significance in shaping attitudes and fixing the status

of ideas, laying down legally the separation between radical and moderate Enlightenment which . . . was to extend across the whole of Europe”(294). For instance, Spinoza’s radical views on philosophical toleration are differentiated from the more moderate toleration of John Locke, a theme on which Israel has published before. The debate about Spinoza’s ideas did not end with his death, an event which was itself the subject of disagreement. Israel outlines the debates aroused by Spinozist writers, such as Johannes Cuffeler, Petrus van Balen, and Hendrick Wyermars. The dissemination of Spinoza’s ideas is traced in a variety of writings, including the fictional *Philopater* and *Description of the Mighty Kingdom of Krinke Kesmes*, Pierre Bayle’s writings (especially his article on Spinoza in the *Dictionnaire*), and in the publications occasioned by the Brandenburg disputes.

One of Israel’s main arguments is that “during the last third of the seventeenth century” there was “a vast triangular contest in Europe between intellectual conservatives, moderates, and radicals”(375) which generated a “psychological tension”(436). That strain certainly was evident in reactions to Balthasar Bekker’s *Betoverde Weereld*, a book which denied magic, witchcraft, and the supernatural, and aroused diverse reactions. Another figure typically overlooked by Enlightenment scholars, but rating detailed discussions by Israel, is Frederik van Leenhof whose “universal philosophical religion” caused a great stir among his contemporaries. “The chief significance of the Leenhof furor was that it demonstrated more clearly than any comparable episode the feasibility of distilling from Spinoza a complete system of social, moral, and political ideas built on philosophical principles totally incompatible with authority, tradition, and revealed religion, which could be effectively popularized and infiltrated into the consciousness of the non-academic reading public, without readers necessarily even realizing they were imbibing Spinozism”(431).

Part IV explores late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century reactions to Spinoza, devoting space to French thinkers such as Bossuet, Melbranche, and Houtteville, but also German thinkers such as Leibnitz. Israel argues, controversially, that the thought of

English thinkers Isaac Newton and John Locke “was both less evident and less universal than is commonly assumed”(526). That is an interesting challenge, but one not entirely substantiated in the pages of this book which ought to be read alongside Roy Porter’s *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Penguin, 2000).

Part V delineates the clandestine progress of the Radical Enlightenment. An interesting chapter explores Spinozistic novels that were not only “fiercely anticlerical and anti-Christian” but whose “ultimate goal is not just to sweep aside revealed religion and ecclesiastical power but, in the realm of fantasy at least, construct an entirely new society from which monarchy, nobility, and hierarchy are excluded, along with institutionalized inequality of the sexes, and in which the well-being of man comes to be based instead on philosophy, enlightenment, equality, virtue, and justice”(598). Another chapter discusses the circulation of clandestine philosophical manuscripts, such as the *Traité des Trois Imposteurs*, which were “the chief method of propagating radical thought in Europe, laying the intellectual foundations, and opening the way psychologically and culturally, for the printed onslaught”(685) of *philosophes* such as Rousseau.

The book is well constructed with few printers’ errors and is illustrated with twenty-three black-and-white prints. The index is useful but does not exhaustively cover the contents of *Radical Enlightenment*, which in any event ought to be read from cover to cover.

Joshua Scodel. *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. viii + 367 pp. \$55.00. Review by IRA CLARK, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA.

In this exemplary work of historical literary criticism, Joshua Scodel offers readers both old-fashioned scholarly and current theoretical virtues. *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* reminds me both of the monumental and meticulous learning that