

THE RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND FREEMASONRY: WHERE WE ARE NOW

Margaret C. Jacob

In 1981 I first articulated the thesis of a Radical Enlightenment. I located it in the time that Paul Hazard, writing in the 1930s, saw as the crisis of the Western mind that is in the period of the 1680s to the 1720s. The radicalism I identified was both political and religious: hostility toward royal absolutism - with republics being seen as the true alternative - coupled with a virulent deism, materialism, if not atheism, largely articulated in the clandestine literature of the period. The loci of these subversive ideas lay in both England and the Dutch Republic. In the story as I told it then, the writings of the English freethinkers, Toland and Collins above all, and texts by both Hobbes and Spinoza figured prominently.¹

The English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century and the bellicosity of Louis XIV, made palpable to all Protestants by the

¹ For recent work on Collins and his circle see Giovanni Tarantino, "The Books and Times of Anthony Collins (1676-1729), Free-thinker, Radical Reader and Independent Whig," in Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of Seventeenth-and Early Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism in Context* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 241-260.

revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, fueled the radicalism. After 1688-89 in particular, large quantities of English texts of Whig or republican origin made their way into French, thanks in large measure to the Huguenot refugees at work in England and the Dutch Republic.

One other ingredient in my 1981 intervention aroused considerable criticism: freemasonry. I identified a manuscript in the possession of John Toland as bearing the tell-tale signs of a Masonic origin: the men called one another *frère*, it was headed by *le Grand Maître*, and it met under statutes and rules - under *Constitutions* - which in 1710, when written in French, did not normally refer to statutes but rather to the constitution of one's health. The term had been imported from English. The signatories of this meeting record were either Huguenot refugees or Protestant book sellers at work in The Hague. To their circle I further traced the most outrageous clandestine manuscript of the 18th century, *Le Traité des trois imposteurs*, which labeled Jesus, Moses and Mohammed as the impostors. To the same circle, and through the manuscripts of Prosper Marchand, Bayle's 1720 editor, I found the letters of Rousset de Missy who by the 1740s had become a leader in Amsterdam's established Masonic lodges.

The 1710 Toland manuscript of a meeting of "the Knights of Jubilation" will probably never be proven to have a Masonic origin - such is the state of the lodge records before 1717. No one, however, has come up with a convincing alternative explanation for the language in the document. Controversy surrounds the Masonic element in the Radical Enlightenment and most recently freemasonry's role in the Enlightenment has been dismissed entirely. The issue comes down to the value of social networks, as opposed simply to ideas in books, in fostering enlightened attitudes and beliefs.

Exported from Britain, freemasonry could also take on meanings separate from its originally British identity. On the European Continent a lodge could appeal to the uprooted, the mercantile, and the cosmopolitan: it was supposedly of ancient origin, democratic in its

ethos, associated with the most advanced form of European government to be found - across the Channel - and capable of being molded to one's tastes while offering charity and assistance to all brothers. In one of the first Paris lodges, we find one member who was a "Negro trumpeter" in the king's guard. Lodges could also exist that included Catholics as well as Protestants, even French clergy found a home. In France women's lodges - although controversial - appear by the late 1740s. In the Dutch Republic they are present by 1751.

In deference to the deep religious divisions in Britain, as in much of Europe, freemasonry endorsed a minimalist creed which could be anything from theism to pantheism and atheism. Not surprisingly, the lodges in England had a high representation of pro-1688-89 Whigs and scientists, while in Paris by the 1740s the philosopher and freemason, Claude Helvétius, was a materialist. The leader of Amsterdam freemasonry, Rousset de Missy, was a pantheist. Montesquieu, also a freemason, was probably some kind of deist. In both London and Amsterdam Jewish names can be found in the lodge records. In France there were lodges for teachers and doctors, indeed even actors were admitted. Rarely do lodge ceremonies, even in Catholic countries, contain overtly Christian language. Many of the religious positions we associate with the Radical Enlightenment appeared conspicuously in some lodges.

As Jonathan Israel has recently drawn to our attention, there was plenty with which to fault the lodges of the eighteenth century. Indeed later in the century Lessing's *Ernst und Falk* (1778) laid out many of the complaints. In the lodges Falk finds objectionable the superstitions about the Knights Templars, the recourse to the magical arts, the play with words, gestures and symbols, and not least, the inability to promote true and absolute equality. Yet Falk clearly implies that there

are freemasons who support the American Revolution.² Far from Lessing “offer[ing] his century’s most scathing critique of freemasonry,” – in Jonathan Israel’s curious reading of the text – *Ernst und Falk* directs the impulse for reform outward toward the state, and then back inward, toward the lodges of its day. Falk, speaking for Lessing, locates freemasonry as a state of mind, a way of being in the world, and not as the imperfect behavior that he, along with the Comte de Mirabeau, so readily observed in everyday lodges.

Why this turn within Masonic circles after mid-century toward enlightened reform, why the laser beam on the state – and then on the lodges? I am arguing that in the move Lessing makes – rhetorically establishing a complete worldly reality where religion (or the divine) is rendered incapable of explaining the human condition – he has, as it were, boxed himself into a new and dual reality. An earlier, clandestine literature associated with the Radical Enlightenment, explains how that reality could take shape. An anonymous philosophe, writing around 1720, points us toward it. In the words of *Le Philosophe* (1743) “the existence of God is the most widespread and deeply engrained of all the prejudices” and in its place *le philosophe* puts civil society: “it is the only divinity that he will recognize on earth.” Trapped by the doctrinal systems of the established churches, government languishes. The *philosophe* explains, “when one is a captive under the yoke of religion, one becomes incapable of the great visions that call on government, and that are so necessary for public situations.”³

² Ibid, p. 46. For the misreading of Ernst und Falk see Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind. Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 72-73.

³ An. [C. Chesneau Du Marsais], *Nouvelles liberté de Penser*, Amsterdam, 1743, “*Le Philosophe*,” one of five tracts, pp. 165-188: “*La société civile est pour ainsi dire, la seule divinité qu’il reconnaisse sur la terre.*” See also <http://www.pierre-marteau.com/c/jacob/clandestine.html>. (seen on 10/06/2013) For a portion of the text

Although writing a half century later than *Le philosophe*, Lessing would never have said in print, or perhaps even thought, such blatantly atheistical sentences. Nevertheless the words of *le philosophe* make crystal clear the implications of the radical version of Enlightenment, i.e., the attention to civil society and government permitted by the absence of the deity. If there is only this world – only civil society – then the other equally real entity must be the institutions of the state, and possibly also those of the church, however corrupted both might be. When meeting in orderly groups, without a single compelling purpose such as science or literature, and when possessed of a set of ideals clearly articulated by Falk, would not the experience of the lodges, with their constitutions, votes, orations, fines for bad behavior, charitable works, and attention to decorum, lead to meditations upon religion and government? More than the scientific societies, or the salons and literary circles, the lodges embraced a specific social ideology that included the bonds of brotherhood, the need “to meet upon the level,” and the necessity for disciplined adherence to the rules for behavior put in place by every lodge.

The lodges could in effect function as schools for governing, and as such they provide an indispensable link between civil society and the Enlightenment, whether radical or moderate. In the earlier part of the century, when it is believed Du Marsais wrote *Le philosophe*, radical texts dwelt more noticeably on religion and its perils. By the second

see <http://www.vc.unipmn.it/~mori/e-texts/philos.htm> (seen on 10/06/2013): “*Il serait inutile de remarquer ici combien le philosophe est jaloux de tout ce qui s'appelle honneur et probité: c'est là sa unique religion. La société civile est, pour ainsi dire, la seule divinité qu'il reconnaisse sur la terre; il l'encense, il l'honore par la probité, par une attention exacte à ses devoirs et par un désir sincère de n'en être pas un membre inutile ou embarrassant.*” “*L'entendement, que l'on captive sous le joug de la foi, déviant incapable des grandes vues que demande le gouvernement, et qui sont si nécessaires pour les emplois publics.*”

half of the century, particularly but not exclusively in absolutist states, the philosophically enlightened gaze shifted toward the state and its institutions.⁴ The scrutiny of the state can be observed in Masonic circles in both France and Germany.

In Paris in 1789 Mirabeau became one of the revolution's most astute observers and participants. Late in the century other German freemasons responded to the tone Lessing set, and they too looked to the Prussian state and its discontents. In the wake of the French Revolution Herder offered his own meditation on freemasonry and the state, in the form of a dialogue that is itself clearly in dialogue with *Ernst und Falk*. He begins by embracing "all the good that has been done [...] in the world." Herder, himself a freemason, reiterates "in the world." He starts with Falk's question, are men created for the state, or the state for men? He then, like Falk, notes all the divisions that states impose upon men, and he ends by invoking his desire to have a society composed of all the thinking men in the entire world.⁵ Herder's embrace of a cosmopolitan and utopian order is another example of Masonic language being employed to investigate the ideal of civil society. This search for a social utopia, too, is perfectly in keeping with the logic of the secular impulse, visible by 1700, and unlocked by the struggle against absolutism in church and state. The Radical

⁴ "L'entendement que l'on captive sous le joug de la foi, devient incapable des grandes vues que demande le gouvernement, et qui sont si nécessaires pour les emplois publics. On fait croire au superstitieux que c'est un être suprême qui l'a élevé au-dessus des autres; c'est vers cet être, et non vers le public, que se tourne sa reconnaissance." It is thought that Du Marsais wrote the text in 1720. For a printed copy, see Alain Mothus and Gianluca Mori, (eds.) *Philosophes sans Dieu. Textes Athées clandestins du XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2010) p. 37 for this quote.

⁵ *Gespräch über eine-unsichtbar-sichtbare Gesellschaft*, in: Ion Contiades (ed.) Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Ernst und Falk; mit den Fortsetzungen Herders und Friedrich Schlegels* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1968) p. 69.

Enlightenment did not invent freemasonry but the logic of the struggle made fraternizing and sociability, separate from church and state, all the more appealing.

Since the 1960s two trends dominated Enlightenment history. One was to situate the Enlightenment in specific national contexts, with little attention to the international circulation of enlightened texts and the predominance of French among all reasonably educated people. Just at the moment when Europeans were forming their economic union, a common cultural legacy dropped out of the discussion. It became possible to question if some countries had even experienced the Enlightenment. Everyone agreed that there had been a Scottish Enlightenment, but historians, such as J.G.A. Pocock, asked if there had ever been an English one. Roy Porter wrote one of his many superb books to counteract the dismissal. People do still write about the Enlightenment in national settings but it is harder to ignore that ideas knew only linguistic borders, seldom territorial ones.

The other trend to which my work on the Radical Enlightenment belongs has been to situate the Enlightenment socially and politically, to find enlightened language within specific contexts, within coteries, circles, salons, Masonic lodges, and to locate the republican tendencies at work among the enlightened. Focus is placed on the 1680s and the threat posed by a newly invigorated absolutism in both France and England. French Protestants fleeing persecution by Louis XIV and his church are awarded pride of place in the new ferment of ideas about religious toleration, the new science, and the search for alternatives to absolutism. Scholars like Robert Darnton (writing on the book trade in France from Switzerland), Wijnand Mijnhardt, and myself have also sought to restore the international dimension and to bring the Dutch republic into the center of the discussion.

In 1700 half the books in Europe, many of them in French, were published there. Spinoza also had Dutch followers, and in the past twenty years, thanks to the work of Wiep van Bunge and Jonathan

Israel, we have learned a great deal about Lodowijk Meyer, the brothers Koerbagh and Willem Deurhoff. My own recent work, co-authored by Lynn Hunt and Wijnand Mijnhardt, has dwelt upon learned artisans in the Dutch Republic. They were the foot soldiers in the dissemination and origination of enlightened ideas. They did the clandestine publishing, circulated forbidden texts in manuscript, and in the case of early participants in the Radical Enlightenment, such as Bernard Picart and Jean-Frederic Bernard, examined the religions of the world without the slightest interest in their veracity.⁶ Similarly the radical Whigs, from the Commonwealth men of the 1690s to John Wilkes in the 1760s, tied the ideals of the English Revolution, of Milton, Harrington, and Sydney, to enlightened pleas for religious toleration, freedom of the press, and reform of corrupt institutions in church and state.

Belonging to neither the national nor contextual trends, the intervention of Jonathan Israel vastly expanded upon the international scope of the Radical Enlightenment and laid renewed emphasis on the contributions of Bayle and Spinoza. In a set of lectures, *The Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (2010 hereafter RM), and in his most recent 800+ page *Democratic Enlightenment* (2011, hereafter DE), Israel summarizes, solidifies, and sometimes alters the arguments of his two much larger and more careful books, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (New York, 2001, hereafter RE) and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (New York, 2006, hereafter EC).

The mentioned lectures and books need to be examined for what they tell us about the methods and implications of Israel's intervention.

⁶ M. Jacob, Lynn Hunt and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe. Bernard and Picart's Religious Customs and Ceremonies of all the Peoples of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2010).

Basically he has turned the Radical Enlightenment into a century long process that begins with Spinoza and ends with the French materialists of the 1780s. In this idealist account, only ideas not social context, and certainly not freemasonry, matter.

Jonathan Israel is an historian with strongly subjective likes and dislikes, and he is a Hegelian dialectician who sees two Enlightenments, one good and radical, the other moderate, of mixed value at best. Born and educated in Britain, Israel finds little of value in the British or American historical experience. The American Revolution failed to emancipate the slaves, and from the perspective of European and American radicals deliberately encouraged “the emergence of an informal aristocracy (RM, p. 44).” The Founding Fathers, in Israel’s typology, embody the Moderate Enlightenment, and possessed of no cosmopolitan impulses, they were content to do the work of revolution only at home. With the exception of Thomas Jefferson, they embraced the Moderate Enlightenment’s “commitment to upholding privilege, rank, and monarchy.” Of course, as the arm-chaired French radical, Comte de Mirabeau noted, the Americans embraced the prejudices of the British (RM, p. 46).

The first instance in the Western world where slavery was abolished – albeit slowly – Pennsylvania in 1780, leaves Israel unmoved. The Quakers who patrolled its borders to prevent owners from taking their slaves south do not merit a place in the radical pantheon. They are just not secular enough. That they and the founding fathers – like Locke – actually *did radical things* becomes irrelevant because for Israel only ideas, and moreover only certain ideas, count. The Anglo-American traditions have made no contribution, Israel assures us, to “full freedom of thought” or with “identifying democracy as the best form of government” (RM, p. 21). Forget John Locke, or John Milton, or

Algernon Sydney, or the Levellers and Diggers, also ditch “the Commonwealth tradition” and, for good measure, the freemasons.⁷

The bountiful gifts of freedom and democracy come to us from “Radical Enlightenment” and it originated in the minds of Hobbes, Bayle, and especially Spinoza, who in turn were followed by various French writers of the early eighteenth century (*RM*, p. 157). The late eighteenth-century Continental revolutions owe their intellectual roots to that particular radical tradition. Thus even the American Revolution, while “a crucial inspiration” for European democrats, “was also a disturbingly defective, truncated revolution (*RM*, p. 40)” and most of its leaders were hopelessly moderate. To be truly radical anyone from Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677) to the French materialist, Baron Paul-Henri Thiry d’Holbach (d. 1789) had to combine “philosophical monism with democracy and a purely secular moral philosophy based on equality (*RM*, p. 21).” Everyone else need not apply.

For Israel the Hegelian dialectic of thesis and antithesis manifests itself in the “unrelenting war” (*RM*, p. 217) between, on one hand, the “court-sponsored” Moderate Enlightenment with its “Eurocentric superiority complex” - embodied most tangibly in Voltaire and the Anglo-American followers of Locke and Newton - and, on the other, Radical Enlightenment, as Israel defines it, offering “an entirely new form of revolutionary consciousness (*RM*, p. 221).” Any theorist with heart-felt religious beliefs belongs in the camp of the moderates. Being devout, if heretical Christians as they were, Newton and Locke fall into

⁷ Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment. Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981; second edition revised, Cornerstone Books, 2006). Although cited most briefly, and also dismissively (p. 696n) in *Radical Enlightenment*, and without discussion, Israel got his thesis, however refigured, and title from *The Radical Enlightenment*; Cf. Dorinda Outram’s review of Israel’s book in *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2001, pp. 464-66.

that less-than-courageous category. Guilt by association requires that anyone bearing the label Newtonian or Lockean “must be perfectly attuned to the Christian faith” (RM, pp. 171-72). Indeed in some places allies of these good English Protestants include the Jesuits (EC, p. 847). That Newtonian science only triumphed in the French colleges, as their foremost historian puts it, “over the dead body of the Jesuit order” is irrelevant to Israel.

Jonathan Israel offers other slights and dislikes. He really cannot stand Rousseau whom he describes as hostile to his radicals (RM, p. 53), as renouncing society as a whole (p. 59), as a nationalist (pp. 61-62), a believer in censorship (p. 63), and an opponent of representative democracy (p. 64) – in short, as proto-totalitarian. The “darker side” of the French Revolution “was chiefly inspired by the Rousseauist tendency (p. 231).” In addition Rousseau’s importance has been vastly overrated. Indeed “book-history demonstrates that these books [by Diderot and d’Holbach] achieved a far greater penetration in the 1770s and 1780s than did Rousseau’s political and social theoretical works, or indeed any other political and social ideology (RM, p. 225).” One can only marvel at the ignorance of the Dutch authorities who in the 1780s banished, not the writings of Diderot or d’Holbach, but Rousseau’s *Social Contract*.

Israel’s likes and dislikes are not, however, unchanging. In his earlier version of *Radical Enlightenment*, the Commonwealth-man John Toland (and the English freethinkers in general) are described as having made a “rather substantial” contribution to the movement (RE, p. 613), and Rousseau is treated as the intellectual equal of Spinoza and Diderot (epilogue). By 2010 even the Baron d’Holbach’s immense debt to Toland has been downgraded, and while mentioned briefly (RM, p. 56), poor Toland has even been left out of the index.

Some obsessions never die. Now in 2010 d’Holbach looms larger than he did in the earlier version of the radical enlightenment, and is wrongly credited with informing the “virtual materialism” of Joseph

Priestley (RM, p. 155, 162). There is a contradiction here since Priestley is now included and he was religious. He was saved by d'Holbach, who like everyone properly radical, derives most of his right thinking from Spinoza. Priestley's spiritual materialism was as day to night from the thinking of d'Holbach, but never once can Israel bring himself to acknowledge that Priestley's Unitarianism expressed his deep devotion to a millenarian Christianity and his detestation of atheism.⁸ Into this galaxy of materialists now a few Christian-Unitarians like Priestley or deist-Unitarians like Jefferson have finally been upgraded. Ignored in 2001, they now merit mention.

Two intellectual habits reoccur throughout these works. First everyone who is radical has been influenced by Spinoza. To achieve the pantheon of spinozist heroes, while discarding the reprobate, Israel approaches the historical evidence and texts selectively. For example, the newly elevated d'Holbach becomes not only *tout court* a follower of Spinoza, but now also "openly egalitarian, democratic and anti-colonial (RM, p. 56)."

The historical record is, however, otherwise. Through the good services of John Wilkes, whom he adored ardently when they were students at Leiden, d'Holbach learned a great deal about English thought, indeed whole passages from Toland's *Letters to Serena* (1704) appear translated in d'Holbach's *Système de la Nature* (1770). He even begins with an anachronistic attack on the Boyle Lectures given in London decades earlier, during Toland's (d. 1722) life time. According to Israel, D'Holbach's imprimatur as materialist, democratic republican and determinist derives from his debt to Spinoza. The only problem

⁸ For the corrective see the magisterial, Robert E. Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997-2004), 2 vols, see vol. 2, chapter 4, "Matter and Spirit."

with this reading is that the baron was actually a liberal, almost utopian monarchist.

The past may be allowed to rest comfortably in a Procrustean bed only if its texts are quoted selectively, if at all, or whole books not to our liking are simply discarded or misread. Unacknowledged by Israel, D'Holbach's *Éthocratie ou le gouvernement fondé sur la morale* (Amsterdam, Marc-Michel Rey, 1776) expressed a *cri de coeur* for the virtuous sovereign, "the guide, the pastor and the father of his subjects...just and good himself, he would command men who resemble him, reasonable citizens, docile subjects who are truly attached [to him]." D'Holbach thought that Louis XVI might be his man. With the help of "the legislator, accommodating himself to the weakness of [men's] minds" a people will receive "enlightenment, education and the sweetness of reason" from the French king (*avertissement*). This was hardly the thinking of someone whom Israel labels a "deliberate, conscious revolutionary[y]" (RM, p. 53). Although deeply critical of the abuses perpetrated by monarchs and nobles, d'Holbach remained firmly on the side of law and order: "every citizen is made to serve the country; he must give to it his talents, his reflections, his councils... To stop the citizen from serving his country is to declare oneself the enemy of *la Patrie*." Not least, in a deviation from Israelian orthodoxy, d'Holbach praises the English who offer an example of how government can be rescued from superstition and tyranny, in "less than two centuries [they successfully] threw off the yoke of Rome, and the yoke of tyranny."⁹ Finally, in Israel's account of d'Holbach's egalitarianism, we never learn that he systematically excluded women from his Paris salon.

⁹ [Par l'auteur du *Système de la Nature*] *Système social. ou principes naturels de la morale et de la politique* (London [actually Amsterdam], 1774) pp. 155, 162.

According to Israel the Radical Enlightenment, unlike Moderate Enlightenment, depended upon a materialist-determinist metaphysics. In the most recent iteration of the thesis, the dichotomy has widened. The “warring and wholly incompatible” Moderate Enlightenment now becomes anti-egalitarian (RM, pp. 111-12, 177). Then those cunning moderates, seeking to bolster and make scientific their disregard for poverty and inequality, and led by Adam Smith and Turgot, invented the dismal science of economics. Israel contrasts the failure of the moderates to deliver on religious toleration, curtail aristocratic privilege, or ameliorate poverty, with the fiery, liberating rhetoric of Thomas Paine, d’Holbach, Diderot and Helvétius, the true heirs of Spinoza.

Not only did Spinoza lay the foundation of both atheism and modern democracy, “indeed, without referring to Radical Enlightenment nothing about the French Revolution makes the slightest sense, or can even begin to be provisionally explained (RM, p. 224).” Israel tells us that, led by the late François Furet, “historians of the revolutionary era...have failed almost entirely” (RM, p. 226) to understand the crucial intellectual developments Israel now proclaims. The French clergy of the late 1780s had it “assuredly right (RM, p. 229),” *la nouvelle philosophe* of the eighteenth century, along with Spinoza, had undermined all authority in church and state.

In this dark vision, allied forces, represented on one side by the clergy and on the other by the Jacobins, undid the Enlightenment and subverted the promise found in the early phase of the French Revolution. In this one respect Israel follows Furet, who in turn follows Augustin Cochin, and they identify freemasonry as part of the dark

underside of the eighteenth-century that led to the Jacobins.¹⁰ Israel has decided that he too really does not like the freemasons, and he ventures forth to find enlightened thinkers, indebted to Spinoza, who can be used to support his case. Israel thinks that Lessing (d. 1781) “steered clear of the secret societies” and indeed saw through their mystique.

The Radical Enlightenment, shorn of its English and Masonic elements, spawned the early phase of the French Revolution. The “proof lies in the controversies (RM, p. 240).” The clerical anti-Enlightenment understood clearly that Spinoza and Bayle were the originators of the “contagion” that was undermining throne and altar. The logic of this argument, read into contemporary politics, would work as follows: if Tea Party activists announce, repeatedly, that American health care reform amounts to socialism, then we should now examine the reading of Democrats to see if they were influenced by Marx or Lenin. Time and again, Israel offers proof that someone followed Spinoza by quoting from a contemporary clerical or royalist opponent who said he did (RM, pp. 26, 74).

It is easy to fall prey to the claims and charges of pious polemicists, especially if read selectively. They were obsessed with Spinoza and spinozism (in ways reminiscent of anti-Communists in the 1950s). Seventeenth-century sale catalogues of books thought nothing of advertising Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) by saying it was written by “an apostate Jew in league with the Devil.”¹¹ The fact of Spinoza’s being a Jew, even if apostate, was often the first item

¹⁰ For an antidote see Kenneth Loiselle, “Living the Enlightenment in an Age of Revolution: Freemasonry in Bordeaux (1788-1794),” *French History*, vol. 24, 2009, pp. 60-81.

¹¹ *Catalogus van boecken inde bybliotheque (sic) van Mr. Jan de Wit...* [1672], The Hague, 1672, no. 33 in appendix. See also *The Abraham Wolf Spinoza Collection* at UCLA. A Facsimile of the *Monno Hertzberger Catalogue*, UCLA, Special Collections, 1990, p. 65.

mentioned by so many polemic assaults on his character and his philosophy.

Blinded by love for Spinoza, it is possible to miss the nuances and transformations that occurred within the materialist reading of nature. In his *Encyclopédie* (1751+) Diderot distinguished the old from the new spinozism,¹² and noted that the signal characteristic of the new spinozism lay in the modern ability to infuse matter with sensibility or life. Where we can find eighteenth-century authors actually describing themselves as pantheists, as did John Toland and the Amsterdam journalist and freemason, Jean Rousset de Missy, we profit from paying close attention to what they meant and intended. Toland tells us of his debt to a calculated reading of Newton,¹³ and Rousset's debt to English ideas and notions of government, and not least, freemasonry, has ever been disputed since it was established back in 1981. What happened to materialism when it gradually became pantheism, or a vitalistic materialism, transformed the course of Western metaphysics. It became possible to postulate law-like force within history and nature, motion inherent in matter, and every materialist from Toland through to Diderot, d'Holbach and Marx saw the remarkable possibilities that such

¹² I owe the mention of this text to John Zammito who brought it to my attention: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*, Paris, vol. 15 p. 474:

"SPINOSISTE, s. m. (Gram.) sectateur de la philosophie de Spinoza. Il ne faut pas confondre les Spinosistes anciens avec les Spinosistes modernes. Le principe général de ceux - ci, c'est que la matière est sensible, ce qu'ils démontrent par le développement de l'œuf, corps inerte, qui par le seul instrument de la chaleur graduée passe à l'état d'être sentant & vivant, & par l'accroissement de tout animal qui dans son principe n'est qu'un point, & qui par l'assimilation nutritive des plantes, en un mot, de toutes les substances qui servent à la nutrition, devient un grand corps sentant & vivant dans un grand espace. De - là ils concluent qu'il n'y a que de la matière, & qu'elle suffit pour tout expliquer; du reste ils suivent l'ancien spinosisme dans toutes ses conséquences."

¹³ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, London, 1704, fifth letter.

an intellectual move permitted. Newtonian science made that move possible as they knew and acknowledged.

The move to a vitalistic materialism could not be made by Spinoza because - to put it simply - he had been dead ten years when Newton's *Principia* appeared in 1687. Newton supplied a law of nature based upon immaterial force operating from the center of bodies, and thus unwittingly offered freethinkers like Toland and Diderot the possibility of making an essential modification on the materialist tradition. If universal gravitation works on all bodies from their centers, it was trivially easy to assert that motion is inherent in matter and that Newton's science has so proven it. The force of eighteenth century vitalistic materialism lay precisely in the ability of those who promoted it to champion Newtonian science while walking away from Newton's own metaphysics which always located the source of motion in immaterial forces of divine origin.

The effect of the recent rewriting of the meaning of the Radical Enlightenment has been to obscure the unity amid complexity of the Enlightenment and its roots. With each passing year Israel has offered dichotomies, distinctions and differences that tunnel the reader's vision into ever narrower, fleeting glimpses of an eighteenth-century past that becomes - at least to this historian - increasingly unrecognizable.

Margaret C. Jacob
Distinguished Professor of History, UCLA

Please note that MAGI are unaware of when and where this article was published. If anyone can provide these details we would be grateful.