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Review of David Sorkin's *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna*

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*Mengzi*, of course, postulates a good human nature, thanks to inborn “sprouts” that, barring adverse exterior influence, will allow one to grow into a moral being. Yang Zhu likewise appears to be safeguarding inner nature from contamination.

In chapter 4, we encounter a group of texts that also locate moral agency within the individual, but which trace a downward arc away from the optimism exhibited in previous texts. The *Zhuangzi*'s Primitivist chapters seem similar to the *Laozi*, but they locate the crux of moral action in our nature rather than in effortlessness. The *Lü shi chunqiu*'s Nurture of Life chapters likewise privilege the body, but return to the notion that a sagacious Son of Heaven is necessary for the well-being of the people. The *Xunzi* paints a darker picture of human nature, portraying it as a ball of willful confusion in need of ritual rectification via human effort. The *Han Feizi* observes that there simply aren't enough sages to govern the burgeoning Chinese state and that their ministrations are in any case not effective enough to tame the teeming masses. Only the might and authority of a just ruler can put us on the path to morality.

Chapter 5 assesses two texts that bring together inner and outer prerogatives. In the *Zhong yong*, education and human nature are complementary, so that external and internal authorities each have clear yet connected roles. Similarly, the *Zhuangzi*'s Syncretist chapters replace human nature with “refined numinosity” and advise us to return to our original state of clarity. However, they also advocate a yin-yang dichotomy of stillness and activity that is to be reflected in government. Within this ideal government, the ruler delegates authority to preserve his effortlessness, while the ministers use their knowledge to play the role of active yang to the ruler's passive yin.

*Individualism in Early China* engages the professional sinologist as an interesting and timely analysis of the classical philosophical corpus. Even those familiar with the texts Brindley cites will likely find in their presentation here a new and compelling perspective. Her assessment provides ample evidence for a kind of individualism relevant to the ethics of human rights in China. Her analysis will also be useful for the wider fields of Chinese intellectual history and religious studies. For those who teach the Mengzi-Xunzi debate on human nature, this will provide excellent and accessible context. Those involved in the wider field of ethics will be interested in the many variations of self-cultivation that she describes. Theology, like self-cultivation, cannot be adequately understood without an anthropological paradigm. Her book articulates several such paradigms, each organically related to, yet nevertheless quite distinct from, the others. Religion is an eminently imaginative enterprise, and this monograph provides insight into how early Chinese authors imagined themselves in moral relation to their bodies, their politico-religious sovereigns, and the logos of the cosmos.

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SORKIN, DAVID. *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. xviii + 339 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

When, in his 1967 book *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (New York: Harper & Row), Hugh Trevor-Roper argued that the Enlightenment had overlooked religious roots, namely Socinianism, Arminianism, and Erasmianism,

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not many acknowledged his important insight. Most likely this was due to the fact that academia had overwhelmingly accepted Peter Gay's Enlightenment narrative, published in two volumes in 1966 and 1969 (*The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* [New York: Knopf, 1966]; *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* [New York: Knopf, 1969]), which diagnosed a dichotomy between this eighteenth-century process and religion, or, more succinctly, identified it with the rise of modern paganism and unbelief. While the recent works of Louis Dupre and Charles Taylor have challenged this account in the disciplinary fields of philosophy and religious studies, David Sorkin has to be credited with dismantling it with the tools of historiography. He builds on the work of Roy Porter, J. G. A. Pocock, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Dale van Kley, and many others who have similarly argued for including religion in the description of the Enlightenment. The question, however, is whether this religious Enlightenment contributed to the values of a modern, secular society we cherish today to the same extent as the radical Enlightenment of Spinoza and Diderot. Most famously, Jonathan Israel would argue that it did not, even if he acknowledges the importance of the religious Enlightenment and laments the lack of research on the theologies of the time.

Sorkin argues convincingly that religion was not always the object of disapprobation but very often drove and invigorated the intellectual debates of the time. He pleads for a comparative view of the religious Enlighteners in Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism in order to show their common ideals, for example, the overcoming of cultural isolation, and to use the "new science and philosophy to promote a tolerant, irenic understanding of belief that could serve a shared morality and politics" (6). This comparative methodology will help historians to better understand confessional identities and will ultimately lead to an expansion of the canon of Enlightenment thinkers. "Only by reclaiming these heretofore ostracized thinkers can we begin to replace the master narrative of a secular Enlightenment with a more historically accurate notion, complex, differentiate, and plural" (5).

Sorkin examines the intellectual achievements of a British Anglican (William Warburton), a Swiss Reformed (Jacob Vernet), a German Lutheran (Siegmond J. Baumgarten), a Prussian Jew (Moses Mendelssohn), and two Catholics, one from France and one from Austria (Adrien Lamourette and Valentin Eybel). He successfully compares their different approaches as the middle way between fundamentalism and rationalism. They aimed at an intelligible religion, balanced between reason and faith, a common morality, a critical interpretation of their holy scriptures, and a strong support for toleration and tolerance. All of these men were quite influential and widely read during their lifetime, but soon forgotten.

This, however, opens up a number of questions that necessarily lead beyond the scope of this extraordinarily lucid and dense book. The first concerns the object of comparison, namely, what these thinkers understood by "religion." As Ernst Feil has shown in his masterful history of the concept (*Religio: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs*, 4 vols. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986–2007]), the understandings vary immensely, and especially from the eighteenth century onward. In other words: Is religion the same "thing" for the four compared authors? Sorkin's important book makes clear that more research is necessary to understand what European religious Enlighteners understood by "religion" if we want to make progress in comprehending their stance toward the Enlightenment process.

Second, Sorkin's intellectual history leads us to wonder how one could construct a similar comparative study about the actual practices of belief in the religious Enlightenment, that is, a comparative, cultural history of their faiths. Could one perhaps find an even greater overlap here than in the intellectual patterns of argumentation? The desire for a simple and intelligible liturgy might suffice as a possible example.

The third methodological question pertains to the subjects of the comparison. With his comparative work, Sorkin has made academia aware of how many historical treasures remain buried because of detailed, confession-oriented scholarship that does not look beyond its narrow focus. He alludes to the connections, friendships, and reading patterns of his main characters, but large-scale research, for example, on the transconfessional, interreligious, and transnational communication networks, or on the mutual reception of Protestants, Jews, and Catholics, is only rarely done. How much do we know about the interconnections between Catholic and Protestant university professors? Moreover, all major research projects on Enlightenment networking either exclude the religious dimension or do not pay attention to it. Sorkin's book might be the long-awaited wake-up call to change this, and to direct attention to the neglected religious history of the Enlightenment and its multifaceted, transnational, transconfessional, and even interreligious face.

Fourth, Sorkin admits that the religious thinkers he presents are "decidedly second rank" but "were prominent and influential in their day" (5). Thus, he reminds us just how intolerant and often narrow-minded the established canon of Enlightenment studies really is and encourages us to reconsider its structure. For example, no eighteenth-century Catholic writer made it into the German canon despite the wide dissemination of the works of Westenrieder and others.

Last but not least, some readers might consider the figures presented here as "conservative Enlightenmenters" at best, as Darrin McMahon did in his review of the book (*Journal of Modern History* 82 [2010]: 673–75), mainly because Sorkin's Enlightenmenters worked together with the establishments of their times. Does collaboration with the state or the economic system really legitimize such a judgment? Is a Catholic thinker like Eybel, who advocates in favor of a church free from papal interventions, the possibility of ecclesiastical divorce, vernacular liturgy, and the election of clergymen, conservative simply because he collaborated with the Habsburgs? Rather, Sorkin's book invites us to reconsider the nature of both conservatism and liberalism. For, as he has argued elsewhere (in his essay "Godless Liberals," <http://www.religiondispatches.org>, October 2008), overcoming the myth of a secular Enlightenment will help to overcome the wrongheaded "polarity of secular liberalism versus faith-based conservatism."

The importance of this book for religious studies and intellectual history cannot be overestimated. It has already become a classic in Enlightenment studies and should be on the reading list of every religion scholar as well.

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THE COWHERDS. *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 272 pp. \$99.00 (cloth); \$35.00 (paper).

Religions are inevitably founded on a notion of truth, a truth more real than the one that spontaneous human perception apprehends. This truth is situated