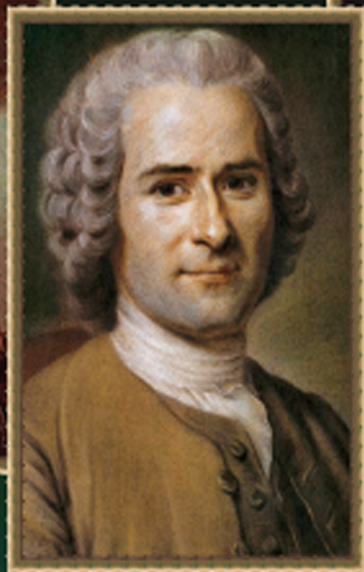


The
Autocritique of
Enlightenment

Rousseau and the Philosophes



Mark Hulliung

With a new introduction by the author

*The Autocritique of
Enlightenment*



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To the memory of Judith N. Shklar



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Introduction to the Transaction Edition

Revisiting *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes*

When I published *The Autocritique of Enlightenment* two decades ago my intentions were twofold. One concern was to restore Rousseau to his historical context, as opposed to the many readings of the great Genevan that have been efforts to impose the agendas of later ages on an unsuspecting and defenseless Jean-Jacques. In this regard my primary targets were the Romantic writers such as Hölderlin who tried to transform Rousseau into one of their own before the dawn of their age, the nineteenth century. While the Romantics certainly revealed something about themselves in their efforts to enroll Rousseau in their ranks, they told us nothing, in my judgment, about him. To understand Rousseau, his writings had to be restored to the eighteenth century, historical procedure had to be honored, texts studied in context. And there was no excuse, as I saw matters, for ambiguity about the relevant context in his case: all his writings were responses to Voltaire, Diderot, and other philosophes.

My second concern was to offer a better understanding and defense of the Enlightenment. Rousseau's name appears only in the subtitle of my volume, whereas "Enlightenment" figures in the title because even more important than redeeming Rousseau was my project of saving the Enlightenment from its many detractors.

From the Romantics of yesterday to the postmoderns of today, the Enlightenment bashers have had their say. At a time such as ours when religious fanaticism is in full force in public life, it is imperative to stand up for the Enlightenment and make the case that it represents the best in our heritage.

Preoccupied with presenting my reinterpretation, I said little or nothing in my book about the scholarly attacks on the Enlightenment of the past several decades that I was repudiating. This new introduction affords me an opportunity for doing so, a chance to fight a necessary battle in what has been called the “Enlightenment Wars.”¹

* * *

During my earliest years as a scholar it was books born of the Cold War that dominated the landscape of Rousseau and Enlightenment studies. A very influential work, written by a famous philosopher of science, was Sir Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. If Plato was designated a “totalitarian” in volume one, then it was Rousseau’s turn in the second volume to be charged with the sin of totalitarianism, in his case the crime of “romantic collectivism.”² Usually more cautious than Popper, well-known political theorist Sir Ernest Barker chimed in with the remark that, “In effect, and in the last resort, Rousseau is a totalitarian.”³

Much the same and likewise highly influential was the argument of J. L. Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, published in 1951, republished a decade later. In Talmon’s eyes the French Revolution anticipated the totalitarian politics of the Soviet Union, and he had no doubt that totalitarianism “has its roots in the common stock of eighteenth-century ideas.” In his account Rousseau and the philosophes bore significant responsibility for the “unbroken continuity” of totalitarian sentiment running from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.⁴

Like so many other Enlightenment bashers Talmon paid but superficial attention to texts and ignored whatever contradicted his views. In his version of the “general will” the individual disappears into the collectivity, which accords poorly with Rousseau’s words in *Political Economy*: “If the government is allowed to sacrifice an innocent man for the safety of the multitude, I hold this maxim to be one of the most execrable that tyranny ever invented . . . Rather than that one ought to perish for all, all have engaged their goods and their lives for the defense of each one among them.” Nor does Rousseau in the *Social Contract* ever ask

individuals to suppress their self-interest: "Why do all constantly want the happiness of each, if not because there is no one who does not apply this word *each* to himself, and does not think of himself as he votes for all?"⁵ Rather than override self-interest, Rousseau, in common with the project of Enlightenment, would render it compatible with justice for all.

In spite of his claims to the contrary, Talmon's book tells the reader nothing about Rousseau, the philosophes, their relationships, or the Enlightenment. It tells us everything, however, about the Cold War liberals, so fearful and defensive that Talmon fell into the trap of unwittingly duplicating the outlook of the European Counter-Revolution. What was Talmon's contrast between "empirical democracy" and "totalitarian, Messianic democracy,"⁶ England and America versus France and Russia, if not a replay of Friedrich Gentz's counter-revolutionary pamphlet of 1800, *The French and American Revolutions Compared*? Twice during the 1950s Gentz was republished, the second time with a chapter added by a modern commentator likening the French to the Russian Revolution. We may conclude that until scholars found a way to distance themselves from the Cold War mentality of the 1950s, studies of Rousseau and the Enlightenment were bound to remain sterile.⁷

* * *

Arguably a turning point arrived in the late 1950s and continued throughout the 1960s with the widely recognized publications of Peter Gay. "Many thinkers have suffered at the hands of commentators, but few have had to endure as much as Rousseau," noted Gay, who had had his fill of scholars who proclaimed Rousseau a totalitarian.⁸ By way of reversing the trend he wrote a new introduction to Ernst Cassirer's *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, and in other works set forth his sympathetic understanding of the age of the *Lumières*, culminating in 1966 and 1969 with his two-volume study *The Enlightenment*. And yet, when all is said and done, one may question whether Gay went far enough in his attempts to reclaim the legacies of Rousseau and the philosophes.

Although Gay greatly admired Cassirer, he was, to his credit, willing to combine criticism with praise of *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. While warning that Cassirer's method of *Verstehen*, of empathic understanding, could lead the historian to impose too much unity on a body of work, Gay praised Cassirer's rejection of the contention of Emile Faguet and others that Rousseau was a hopelessly

confused and inconsistent writer, an arch-individualist in the *Discourse on Inequality*, an extreme collectivist in the *Social Contract*.

Sometimes Gay's criticisms of Cassirer were too understated to be effective. Quite rightly Gay noted that the neo-Kantian Cassirer was excessively eager to make of Rousseau a Kantian *avant la lettre*; but nowhere does Gay point out that Cassirer diminished the French Enlightenment when he incorporated Rousseau into the German Enlightenment. Gay does not object to Cassirer's omission of Rousseau's debates with Diderot, d'Holbach, Voltaire, d'Alembert, and others.

Nor does Gay underscore how seriously Cassirer misled his readers when he likened the general will to the categorical imperative. Unlike the categorical imperative which pertained to all rational beings, Rousseau's general will was a law limited to the citizens of a political entity, the city-state. Actually it was Diderot's version of the general will, as adumbrated in his article "Natural Right," that was close to Kant's later formulation in that it pertained to all humanity. Rousseau repudiated Diderot's position as well-meaning but meaningless.

And where Kant proclaimed that following the moral law had nothing to do with the search for happiness, Rousseau, as a good son of the French Enlightenment, said precisely the opposite. As much as any French philosophe, Rousseau vindicated the search for happiness, while blaming the "civilization" championed by the philosophes for blocking our quest: "It is not without difficulty that we have succeeded in making ourselves so unhappy,"⁹ he sighed.

Peter Gay also missed one of Rousseau's most vital ties to the Enlightenment, his quest to enlist science in behalf of humanity. Both Gay's appreciation of Cassirer and his own *Voltaire's Politics: The Poet as Realist* (1959) led him away from recognition of how attuned Rousseau was to the emerging life sciences in France. In Cassirer's case the "state of nature" was merely a "regulative idea," a moralistic "as if," which meant he could ignore Rousseau's thoughts on how the orang-utan might be the earliest of humans. As for Voltaire, he introduced Newtonian physics to France early in his career, but later mimicked the Church in his hostility to the emerging life sciences. Author of a book on Voltaire, Gay saw the French Enlightenment through his eyes and hence failed to appreciate Rousseau's efforts to merge life science with philosophical history in the *Second Discourse*.¹⁰

Far and away Gay's most outstanding contribution was his two-volume study which placed on display the great riches of the Enlightenment and gave the lie to its detractors. In the preface to the first volume

of *The Enlightenment* Gay made the long overdue move of objecting to the use of the term “preromantic” in discussions of works such as *Le Neveu de Rameau* or *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: “This is definition by larceny; it is to strip the Enlightenment of its riches and then to complain about its poverty.”¹¹

However much Gay accomplished, he left behind an unfulfilled legacy, especially where Rousseau was concerned. As opposed to Cas-sirer and the Romantics, both of whom removed Rousseau from the French Enlightenment, the former by locating him within the German Enlightenment, the latter by removing him from the Enlightenment, Gay on first glance seems to have understood the need to treat Rousseau as a figure of Enlightenment, French style. Yet Rousseau fares poorly in Gay’s volumes, appearing sparingly and insignificantly. We do not encounter Rousseau at any length until near the end of the second volume, and even then Gay marginalizes Rousseau with the comment that “his thought was at once too ancient, with its reminiscences of classical philosophy, and too modern, with its anticipations of future problems” to fit into his age.¹² One must applaud that Peter Gay opened the door to the study of “Rousseau and the philosophes” but lament that he failed to pass through it.

* * *

So far we have observed the Enlightenment through the spectacles worn by Anglo-Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. Turning now to the 1970s, we shall look at the interpretations of the Enlightenment voiced by French intellectuals. What makes the 1970s in France fascinating is the return of liberalism to favor after decades of banishment. On the face of it, studies of the Enlightenment had much to gain by the revival of French liberalism. Alas, all too often the new French intellectuals accomplished little more than to mimic, inadvertently, the American Cold Warriors of the 1950s. Enlightenment studies continued to suffer.

Marxism was everything, liberalism nothing after World War II because the liberals, disdainful of the Third Republic, stood by idly while it fell. Only Raymond Aron was willing after the war to accept the liberal label. Albert Camus, despite his repudiation of the Soviet Union, despite his pleas for moderation, and despite his opposition to the death penalty, carefully avoided the dreaded label of “liberal.” It was not until the late 1970s that a generation of intellectuals, the *nouveaux*

philosophes, stepped forth to challenge Marxist-Leninism and extol the virtues of liberalism. André Glucksmann, Alain Finkielkraut, and Pascal Bruckner were numbered among this group when it emerged around 1977, the year *nouveau philosophe* Bernard-Henri Lévy released *Barbarism With A Human Face*.

Lévy's hatred of Stalinism is only to be expected, but that he should hate the Enlightenment as much as Stalinism and blame the Enlightenment for the Gulag is simply absurd: "It is not an accident," he writes, "if the Soviet camps were conceived and organized on a rational, quasi-industrial model, borrowed from an Enlightenment ideology." Disgust, contempt, and loathing are his attitudes towards "a left that makes a virtue of its adhesion to the principles of the *Lumières*." What this means, he explains, is that notions of historical progress were put forth by *philosophes*, then by Marx, and finally by Stalinists who committed mass murder in the name of eliminating the enemies of progress.¹³ To read Lévy is to be transported back in time and space to America in the 1950s: back to the excesses of Cold War liberalism.

There is no need for us to dwell on the far-fetched claim that Stalin consulted philosophies of history before deciding to initiate his purges. For our purposes what matters is to point out that Lévy missed the profound ambivalence of the *philosophes* about "progress." Adam Ferguson, speaking of the forward march of the division of labor, warned that the workshop "may be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men," and feared that "beyond their own particular trade, [workers] are ignorant of all human affairs."¹⁴ Richard Price thought there could be too much progress and held that "the happiest state of society" was "the middle state of civilization, between the first rude and its last refined and corrupt state."¹⁵ Crossing the Channel, Lévy could not miss that Rousseau mourned for a lost, golden age destroyed by progress; he was, however, so poorly read in the French texts that he had no idea that Helvétius, Diderot, and d'Holbach yearned for an age when savagery and civility, nature and civilization, were in equilibrium and "happy mediocrity" the fate of mortals.¹⁶

As if holding the Enlightenment responsible for Stalin were not enough, Lévy added for good measure the charge that the *philosophes* were responsible for the injustices of nineteenth-century imperialism. When Jules Ferry and his companions colonized Africa and Indochina, they acted as "faithful disciples of the *Lumières*."¹⁷ Again it was philosophies of progress to which Lévy pointed in assigning responsibility, because they gave enlightened souls a rationale justifying their imperial designs. A remarkable

example he did not cite was John Stuart Mill who in *On Liberty*, of all places, stated that “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement.” Or, in the same text, Lévy might have cited Mill’s statement that “if the Chinese are ever to be improved, it must be by foreigners.”¹⁸

There is no denying that Mill, Tocqueville,¹⁹ Ferry and many another enlightened public figure of the nineteenth century and later championed imperialism. The question that must be asked, however, is why does Lévy blame the Enlightenment for their indiscretions? Montesquieu and other philosophes constantly denounced the Spanish rape of the Americas.²⁰ Adam Smith and Montesquieu were among those who pressed the case that nations would do well to advance their interests through commerce rather than conquest. And while it is true that Buffon wrote that Europeans were the masterpiece of existence and black skin was a degeneration from white, it is also true that the counter-attack came from a leading figure of the Enlightenment, Rousseau, whose rewrite of natural history overturned all of Buffon’s claims.²¹

We may therefore posit the proposition that the problem is not, as Lévy suggests, that nineteenth-century liberal imperialists were the faithful disciples of the Enlightenment, but rather precisely the opposite, that they had lost sight of it. The problem, moreover, is that Lévy, in renewing liberalism, repeats its error of cutting itself off from the Enlightenment.

In general, one may suggest that the fatal shortcoming of the new French liberalism of the 1970s was that, like all preceding French liberalisms, it became so much a neoconservatism as to stifle the liberal impulse. Guizot, Thiers, and Tocqueville did not respond constructively to the Second Republic; Le Bon and Renan became illiberal during the Third Republic; and one may conjecture that the liberals of the Fifth Republic will not fulfill their promise unless and until they come to appreciate their Enlightenment heritage.²²

* * *

The 1980s witnessed a bold new intellectual move, an effort to view the Enlightenment from below. Leading the charge was Robert Darn-ton who published *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* in 1982. The question he asked was an old one, “What was the relation between the Enlightenment and the Revolution?”²³ Very new, however, was his strategy for providing an answer. Not for him “C’est la

faute de Voltaire; c'est la faute de Rousseau"; not for him another study of the "High Enlightenment." Instead, he would examine the inhabitants of Grub Street, "the bottom of the Enlightenment."

Darnton's focus was on the many would-be Voltaires who bet their careers on Paris, failed, and were reduced to eking out a living as police spies, scandal mongers, or philosophical pornographers. Envious of the successful philosophes, the denizens of Grub Street took their revenge during the Revolution. "It was in the depths of the intellectual underworld that these men became revolutionaries and that the Jacobinical determination to wipe out the aristocracy of the mind was born."²⁴

Darnton's thesis is enticing but his evidence questionable. Studies of the constitutional discussions from 1789 to 1791 have proven definitely the impact of the High Enlightenment on the Revolution: Montesquieu and Rousseau are ever present during the debates over sovereignty, representation, and related issues.²⁵ The case for the influence of the Low Enlightenment is far less compelling. By Darnton's own admission "pamphleteers had lived by the libel since the time of Aretino,"²⁶ so why assume libels suddenly had revolutionary consequences? More fundamentally, why assume that the jealousies and hatreds of the Grub Streeters, their ugly hits at the philosophes, can plausibly be designated "the Enlightenment," low or high? Surely to belong to the Enlightenment one must uphold its ideals.

The enormous influence of Darnton's work can only in part be explained in terms of its decided charm. Very likely another factor was that his book marked a fulfillment of an ongoing reversal of the scholarship of the 1950s. Blame for totalitarianism during the 1950s was frequently laid at the feet of "the masses," an anti-democratic theme that accounts for the reprints of Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses*, of Jacob Burckhardt's likeminded lectures, and the success of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Then there were the "Great Books," placed at the center of the curriculum in the 1950s, the classic texts which supposedly encapsulated "perennial wisdom," useful in fending off the totalitarian threat. Come the upheavals of the 1960s, the time was ripe for a reaction which took the form of sharply demoting intellectual history while conspicuously promoting social history. Workers, women, gays, blacks, ethnic minorities would now have their voice in histories that were as populist and democratic as the scholarship of the 1950s had been anti-populist and anti-democratic.

Darnton's publications, similar to those of the social historians, are the 1950s turned upside down. His strengths and his weaknesses are identical to those of the social historians. When he and they reach into the lower ranks of society and tell the stories of the forgotten and downtrodden, we must applaud. When he and they slide towards treating social history as the "real" story, intellectual history as marginal or epiphenomenal, we must object.

It is not obvious that historians should replace the anti-democratic prejudices of the 1950s with the democratic prejudices of our time. Rousseau may have been the darling of Grub Street, Voltaire its nemesis, as Darnton suggests, but to say so is not to advance our knowledge of the Enlightenment.²⁷

* * *

In sum, from the 1950s to the 1980s scholars abused the Enlightenment by reading into it the animosities and obsessions of their own times. So I believed, and sought with the publication of my book in 1994 to challenge these misleading injections of the twentieth century into the eighteenth.

There was another recurring problem I implicitly wished to address, the failure of noteworthy intellectuals to understand the links that do in fact exist between the two centuries. In the 1990s one of the great documents of human freedom, the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, was repeatedly portrayed as an instrument of oppression. This inaccurate and disturbing charge might never have been lodged, I believe, had the accusers remembered the debates between Diderot and Rousseau.

The scholar who in the early 1990s spearheaded the assault on the French Declaration was liberal historian Tony Judt.²⁸ Arch-reactionary Joseph de Maistre had famously objected to the word "Man" in the Declaration, remarking that he had seen Frenchmen and Italians, but had never set eyes on "Man." For Judt, by contrast, it was the word "Citizen" that was objectionable: The French republican tradition, he averred, was fundamentally hostile to universal human "rights," and he argued that claims of rights grew weaker and weaker as one moves from the Declaration of 1789 to those of 1795 and 1848.

The evidence, however, contradicts Judt's generalization. By his account the Constitution of 1848 should be markedly indifferent to rights. How then do we explain that Article 3 of the preamble proclaimed that the republic "recognizes rights and duties anterior and

superior to positive laws"?²⁹ Again, anyone who reads the debates that preceded adoption of the Constitution of 1848 encounters a wealth of talk about rights. The debate was over social rights, with liberals such as Adolphe Thiers warning that to include Louis Blanc's mildly socialist proposals would be to destroy civilization, while republicans argued for social rights by adding them to the list of natural rights.³⁰

The puzzle of how the brilliant Tony Judt could stray so far from sound judgment may be resolved by noting his prior history as a Cold Warrior who delighted in damning Sartre and French fellow travelers. Shortly after the demise of the Berlin wall Judt apparently transferred his hostility from Leninists to French republicans, treating all French republics as revivals of the Jacobin First Republic. It is revealing that, for him, no commentary on the French republican tradition is complete without a gratuitous reference to Brecht or Soviet ideology.³¹ Talmon still lives in the pages of Tony Judt.

An invaluable key to understanding the French Declaration may be found in the debate between Diderot and Rousseau to which we have previously alluded: Diderot's essay "Natural Right" and Rousseau's critique, "On the General Society of the Human Race." Diderot addressed "man" in his article; Rousseau, in his refutation set the stage for modern French history by explaining in powerful terms why "man" is nothing without the "citizen." We should accept neither by itself; we need both "man" and "citizen" or the quest for human rights cannot succeed.

Diderot in "Natural Right" asked why anyone should do the right thing, given that we all naturally favor ourselves. His answer was that if everyone acts on the basis of short-term self-interest, chaos will be the result. To avoid that outcome, to construct a moral society, to enshrine human rights, he advised that we appeal to "the general will," "the general and common interest." "Particular wills are suspect . . . but the general will," defined as the will of the entire human race, "is always good."³²

Rousseau responded by pointing out that Diderot's general will was merely an abstraction: "The expression 'human race' only suggests a purely collective idea which supposes no real union among the individuals who constitute it." Moreover, "it is only from the social order established among us that we draw ideas about the one we imagine . . . and we do not really begin to become men until after we have been citizens." Without a political community, without citizenship, our rights have no embodiment or practical significance.³³

So effective was Rousseau's argument that eventually Diderot and d'Holbach came around to a similar view. Later, their outlook became the familiar view of the French republican tradition: That neither the rights of man nor the rights of the citizen sufficed; only the rights of man and citizen combined could satisfy anyone determined to take rights seriously.

Had Tony Judt remembered the exchanges between Rousseau and Diderot, he might have stopped his campaign against the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen before he started. Then he would have been free to remember how admirably the Declaration has served throughout French history as a call for inclusion. Following its passage women, Jews, and slaves quickly appealed to the Declaration for admittance to full citizenship. Throughout subsequent French history the pattern has persisted: Outsiders have sought recognition of their rights by citing the Declaration, perhaps most famously when the supporters of Dreyfus rallied to the League for the Defense of the Rights of Man.³⁴

Tony Judt was led astray not only by his ideological passion, but also by his neglect of Rousseau and the philosophes.

* * *

My first order of business in the *The Autocritique of Enlightenment* was to restore Rousseau to his milieu, the world of the philosophes. To that end it was important to stress that he was the leader of his philosophical cohort in the battle over Italian versus French music; that he contributed generously to the collective undertaking of the *Encyclopédie*; and that during his early years in Paris he personally introduced one philosophe to another, Condillac to Diderot, for instance. On the intellectual front he shared with his fellow philosophes a deep debt to the empiricism of John Locke, and, like them, used Locke to advantage in charting a course in philosophical history. Their vocabulary of utility, natural rights, and social contract; their concern to reconcile interest with virtue, were his as well, no matter how much he transformed their reasoning and findings. He likewise shared their abiding respect for science and strove for his own purposes to further their bold pursuit of the new life sciences.

Over time Rousseau fell out with almost all the philosophes but he never abandoned the Enlightenment's ideals of toleration, freedom, and personal autonomy. Again and again, to the consternation of his

former allies, he utilized philosophical history and other methods typical of the philosophes to explain that the obstacles to the ideals of the Enlightenment were much more formidable than realized and the remedies far more demanding than admitted. The problem was not only the Church, as Voltaire believed; it was society itself, as Rousseau argued in his *First and Second Discourses*.

Voltaire thought Paris a “paradise”; Rousseau thought it essential that he leave Paris. D’Alembert’s motto was “Liberty, Truth, Poverty”; Rousseau was the philosophe who chose to live the simple life rather than seek a pension or a position in the academies. In both his theory and his practice Rousseau subjected his age, known as the age of criticism, to vigorous self-criticism.

The philosophes came to resent Rousseau, but they had their own reasons for having second thoughts about their program. It was far from obvious that the would-be agents of enlightenment would find the wherewithal to sustain themselves without selling out, as had the nephew of *Rameau’s Nephew*. Slow though they were to adopt the political point of view that came naturally to Rousseau, some of them eventually evolved to the point of maintaining that the republic of letters could only thrive if located within a republic. Montesquieu’s designation of England as a republic hiding under the form of a monarchy was taken up by Helvétius, who argued that only under a republic can there be an enlightened public more interested in instruction than amusement. Diderot and d’Holbach eventually agreed. The autocritique of Enlightenment was not the monopoly of Rousseau; the philosophes were active participants.

When works such as *Rameau’s Nephew* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* are restored to their proper context—the world of Rousseau and the philosophes—the result is that we come face to face with an Enlightenment as rich as that of the Enlightenment bashers is poor, and as relevant to our day as to its day. Nothing could be more foolhardy than to cut ourselves off from such a worthy heritage; nothing more proper than to reaffirm our ties to the Enlightenment and to continue the process of autocritique.

Notes

1. Recently I had an opportunity to discuss the “Enlightenment Wars” and shall draw upon my comments in this Introduction. Mark Hulliung, “Rousseau and the Philosophes: Facing Up to the ‘Enlightenment Wars’” in Michael O’Dea, ed., *Rousseau et les philosophes*, SVEC, Voltaire Foundation, 2010, pp. 235–250.

2. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (NY: Harper, 1962), p. 52. Originally published in 1945.
3. Ernest Barker, *The Social Contract* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. xxxviii. Originally published in 1948.
4. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (NY: Praeger, 1961), pp. 1, 3, 24. Originally published in 1951.
5. Rousseau, *Économie politique*, in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1964), vol. 3, p. 256; *Contrat social*, OC, vol. 3, p. 373.
6. Talmon, *Origins*, pp. 1, 4.
7. Liberal intellectuals, it is worth noting, did not have a monopoly on the charge that “Enlightenment is totalitarian.” The same view was set forth, albeit in a different fashion, by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (NY: Continuum, 1999), p. 6. Originally published in 1944.
8. Peter Gay, “Introduction” to Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 4. Gay’s introduction was originally published in 1954.
9. Rousseau, OC, vol. 3, p. 202.
10. Jacques Roger, *Les Sciences de la vie dans la pensée française du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Colin, 1963). Robert Wokler, “Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures,” *Daedalus* 107 (1978), pp. 107–134.
11. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (NY: Knopf, 1967–69), 2 vols., vol. 1, p. x.
12. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 552.
13. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *La Barbarie à visage humain* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), pp. 149, 169–170.
14. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 74, 173.
15. Richard Price, *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 56, 144–145.
16. Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 141–143.
17. Lévy, *La Barbarie*, p. 69.
18. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1978), pp. 10, 69.
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21. Hulliung, *Autocritique*, ch. 5.
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23. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1982), p. 16.
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25. E. g., Keith Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 11.
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- 27. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.
- 28. Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), ch. 12; “Rights in France: Reflections on the Etiology of a Political Language,” *The Tocqueville Review*, 14 (1993), pp. 67–108.
- 29. Maurice Duverger, ed., *Constitutions et documents politiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), p. 90.
- 30. Hulliung, *Citizens and Citoyens*, pp. 37–40, 44–51.
- 31. Judt, “Rights in France,” pp. 73, 77.
- 32. Diderot, *Oeuvres*, vol. 3, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), p. 46.
- 33. Rousseau, *OC*, vol. 3, pp. 287, 283.
- 34. Hulliung, *Citizens and Citoyens*, pp. 45–6.

Preface

The time has come, I believe, for us to move a step beyond current interpretations of the Enlightenment. Much of the richness and complexity of the Enlightenment, its moments of self-doubt and its boldest experiments in self-criticism, are lost when Rousseau is removed from his milieu by calling him a preromantic or a pre-Kantian; or, again, when *Rameau's Nephew* is interpreted, in Hegel's manner, as a portent of the impending breakdown of the old aristocratic order, instead of being read as a revelation of Diderot's doubts whether the philosophes would ever become the self-sustaining, independent agents of Enlightenment they professed to be.

It is one of the peculiarities of recent scholarship that it is so willing to see the seeds of radicalism in the low French Enlightenment, the hack writers of Grub Street; so unwilling to detect the growth of republican thought in the high Enlightenment, the writings of the philosophes. I hope to do something to restore the balance in this study. If along the way I manage to show that there is more to such figures as Holbach and Helvétius than one would think to read the secondary literature, so much the better.

Primarily, however, my concern shall be to demonstrate that the Enlightenment gains enormously in depth and creative intellectual tension when Rousseau is readmitted to his cultural habitat, the world of the encyclopedists. Had the philosophes labored as diligently to answer Rousseau as they did to discredit his person, there is no limit to what the Enlightenment might have accomplished.

* * *

Over the years I have accumulated a number of debts to other scholars. I hope they will forgive me for relegating them to the notes, provided my purpose in doing so is to underscore my gratitude to a single person, Judith N. Shklar. Her formidable intellect, vibrant and

challenging personality, openness of mind, disdain for fads, contempt for ideologues, and unshakable integrity made her a model worthy of admiration. We are all the poorer for her premature death, at the height of her powers, during a period of her life when she was producing her routinely brilliant studies at an ever more feverish pace.

For her the Enlightenment was “home,” because she shared both the skepticism and the faith of d’Alembert, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. Saddened by her death but comforted to realize that I was once in the presence of greatness, I dedicate this book to Dita.

Cast of Supporting Characters

There may be potential readers unfamiliar with the lesser philosophes, yet keenly interested in Rousseau, Diderot, and critiques of the Enlightenment. Brief comments about a few of the less well known figures of the philosophical party may be helpful to such readers.

Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (1717–1783)

Outstanding mathematician, able and successful man of letters, d'Alembert was dedicated to the cause of “philosophy” and attentive to the conditions necessary to secure the independence of its spokespersons. He shared editorial responsibilities for the *Encyclopédie* with Diderot until the grave political troubles of the late 1750s, when, at the urging of his mentor, Voltaire, he decided that discretion was the better part of valor. After that, d'Alembert concentrated his efforts on stacking the academies with philosophes. As a member of the Academy of Sciences since 1741 and of the French Academy since 1754, where he would eventually serve as perpetual secretary, d'Alembert was ideally situated to win the academies for his *parti pris*.

Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707–1788)

Buffon's ongoing *Natural History* was one of the most widely read works of the century. Some of Rousseau's most audacious thoughts in the *Discourse on Inequality* are adapted from an unwilling Buffon. In *Émile* Rousseau again made use of the *Natural History*.

Étienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac (1714–1780)

The most proficient of the philosophes in formal philosophical inquiry, Condillac devoted his life to spelling out the full consequences of Locke's epistemology and psychology. Not only are there no innate ideas; neither are there innate mental faculties, insisted Condillac, who backed up his claim with a bold effort to derive all the faculties from sense experience. Some of the philosophes—Grimm most

belligerently—rejected Condillac’s writings; all were influenced in one way or another by the timid and withdrawn abbé. Both Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* and his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* draw upon the work of Condillac, his companion during his early years in Paris.

Charles-Pineau Duclos (1704–1772)

Elected perpetual secretary of the French Academy in 1755, Duclos labored to restore the integrity of that institution, which made him unwilling to give special consideration either to titled persons lacking proper intellectual credentials or to philosophes, whom he regarded as unduly partisan and sectarian. Not the least remarkable of his achievements is that he was the one writer who managed to stay on good terms with Rousseau. Author of the highly successful *Considerations on the Mores of This Century* (1750).

Friedrich-Melchior Grimm (1723–1807)

One of Rousseau’s friends during the early Parisian years, Grimm shared with Jean-Jacques a love of music and a determination to champion Italian opera at the expense of its French counterpart. Eventually the two men were to be bitter enemies, Rousseau priding himself on his poverty and independence, Grimm devoting his life to serving the *grands*. Grimm wrote a newsletter, the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique*, for the crowned heads and potentates of Europe; formed strong ties with Catherine the Great; and succeeded in acquiring the title of baron.

Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771)

Helvétius was the author of two books, *De l’Esprit* and *De l’Homme*, each something of a scandal because he espoused environmental determinism and reduced all motives to the search for physical pleasure. The stir caused by *De l’Esprit* (1758) figured in the events leading the authorities to revoke the “privilege” that had permitted open publication of the *Encyclopédie*. Helvétius was the first among the philosophes to argue that a republic of letters can thrive only in a political republic. Before long, others would arrive at the same political conclusion, even as they continued to reject his philosophical assumptions.

Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach (1723–1789)

Holbach contributed several hundred articles to the *Encyclopédie*, many on metallurgy, mineralogy, and geology, and a few on political topics, such as the essay “Representatives.” He was the author, also, of anonymous works, well known for their atheism and materialism, insufficiently known, in my judgment, for their republican and constitutionalist politics. His Parisian home was a leading center of the Enlightenment, a place where philosophes of varying outlooks and nationalities could debate ideas over dinner and exchange views with administrators and other public figures, French and foreign.

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, baron de l'Aulne (1727–1781)

Turgot was a philosophe and a distinguished public servant. As a philosophe he contributed to the *Encyclopédie*, propounded a theory of progress, and advocated physiocratic principles in economics. As a public servant he rose to the exalted post of controller-general of finances in 1774, at the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI, only to be dismissed in 1776.



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Author's Note on Works Referenced

I have used the Pléiade edition of Rousseau's *Oeuvres complètes*. When it was necessary to look elsewhere, I have chosen editions both accessible and reliable: for instance, the Charles Porset edition of the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Paris: Nizet, 1970) and the Michel Launay edition of the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (Paris, 1967), published by Garnier-Flammarion. Many of the translations are my own but I have also used those of Judith and Roger Masters and Allan Bloom. For Diderot I have first called upon the readily available Classiques Garnier editions. Other citations are to Diderot's complete works; "A-T" designates citations to the old Assézat-Tourneux edition of Diderot's complete works, "H" to the new Hermann edition. For d'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire* I have used the Flammarion edition, *Encyclopédie* (Paris, 1986), vol. I. All other references to d'Alembert writings are to the *Oeuvres de d'Alembert*, 5 vols. (Paris: A. Belin, 1821–22). In the case of Condillac, references are to the *Oeuvres philosophiques de Condillac*, ed. G. Le Roy (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947–48). The very few citations to Montesquieu are to the Pléiade edition. For Helvétius I have called upon the Fayard edition; for Buffon, whenever possible, the *Oeuvres philosophiques de Buffon*, edited by Jean Piveteau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954). Citations to the complete works of Buffon are to the version published by Eymery, Fruger et Cie (Paris, 1828–29), though unfortunately the volumes of this edition are not in chronological order. For Voltaire I have used the Moland edition (1877–1885) whenever it was necessary to consult the complete works. But insofar as possible I have referred to more accessible editions: for example, the Garnier Frères edition of the *Romans et contes*. My source for the complete works of Turgot is the edition edited by Gustave Schelle, 5 vols. (Paris: Fléix Alcan, 1913–1922). References to Turgot's two lectures on progress are to

R. Meek, ed., *Turgot on Progress, Sociology, and Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); references to the *Mémoire sur les municipalités* are to K. Baker, ed., *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). As for the other authors, Holbach, Duclos, La Mettrie, and so on, the sources are as indicated in the endnotes. I have employed standard abbreviations when citing articles in scholarly journals: SVEC = *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*; JHI = *Journal of the History of Ideas*; AJJR = *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. I wish to thank the Mazur Faculty Fund of Brandeis University for assistance in collecting the sources necessary to write this book.

Introduction

Rousseau and the Philosophes

Few periods of intellectual and cultural history elicit such persistent interest as the Enlightenment. Whether it is to reclaim or to reject our heritage, we constantly find ourselves returning to the writers of the eighteenth century. Enlightenment-bashing, whether from the standpoint of romanticism, existentialism, critical theory, structuralism, or deconstruction, continues to be a favorite activity of intellectuals, many of whom wish to call the entire tradition of “humanism” into question. Those who cherish the heritage of the Enlightenment, for their part, regard every such challenge as another reason to appreciate the age of Diderot, Hume, and Kant. With so much at stake it is not surprising that over the last several decades scholarly studies of the Enlightenment in various national contexts, of specific authors and themes, of the diffusion of “philosophical” ideas from capital to provinces, and of the fate of enlightened ideals in revolutionary politics have flourished as never before.

Yet it is arguable that at least one topic of the utmost importance, the relationship between Rousseau and the philosophes, has been relatively neglected. Everyone knows that during the *siècle des lumières* all roads led to Paris, that Galiani and Beccaria came from Italy, Hume and Adam Smith from Scotland, Ben Franklin from America, Grimm and Holbach from the German states, and that Kant who traveled not at all was nevertheless profoundly moved by Rousseau. It is also widely acknowledged that when Rousseau originally arrived in Paris in the early 1740s he did so as a would-be philosophe, whereas when he left it in the mid-1750s his departure marked the beginning of his reputation as an ex- and antiphilosophe. Less recognized is that the road from Paris to the Hermitage on Madame d'Épinay's estate was a trail not away from the French Enlightenment but to a better vantage point from which to launch an alternative Enlightenment, as a sequel to his earlier efforts to force the Enlightenment to question itself.