

WHAT ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT?

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In memory of Jonathan B. Knudsen, historian

BLAMING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Even a brief encounter with recent criticisms of the Enlightenment can provoke a sense of *déjà vu*. More often than not, they do little more than repeat arguments that the Enlightenment's contemporaries (and for that matter, the Enlightenment itself) had already offered. The few novelties encountered in this genre are rarely improvements. Take, for example, the curious complaint lodged against the Enlightenment by the political scientist James Q. Wilson:

We live in a world shaped by the ambiguous legacy of the Enlightenment. That epochal development enlarged the scope of human freedom, prepared our minds for the scientific method, made man the measure of all things, and placed individual consent front and center on the political stage. By encouraging these views it strengthened the sense of sympathy and fairness.

However, after two centuries the noble dreams of the advocates of enlightenment have degenerated into empty "rights talk":

The worthy desire to replace a world in which people were born, lived, and died in a fixed social slot with a world in which people faced a career open to talents and a political system in which they participated gave rise, as most worthy desires do, to a tendency to carry matters to an extreme. . . . If rights are all that is important, what will become of responsibilities? If the individual man is the measure of all things, what will become of the family

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This essay was originally presented as part of a panel on Enlightenment in Contemporary Debate at the Tenth International Congress on the Enlightenment, Dublin, July 25-31, 1999. The author wishes to thank Professor David Denby of Dublin City University for the effort he put into organizing this session.

POLITICAL THEORY, Vol. 28 No. 6, December 2000 734-757
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that produces and defines man? If being sympathetic with the plight of distant or less fortunate people is the best test of the decent man, what will become of his duties to those nearest to and most like him?

In Wilson's view, questions such as these reveal that the Enlightenment rests on a "fatally flawed assumption":

Namely, that autonomous individuals can freely chose, or will, their moral life. Believing that individuals are everything, rights are trumps, and morality is relative to time and place, such thinkers have been led to design laws, practices, and institutions that leave nothing between the state and the individual save choices, contacts, and entitlements. Fourth grade children being told how to use condoms is only one of the more perverse of the results.¹

There is little here that has not been said before. Only the memorable closing image of fourth graders fumbling with condoms distinguishes Wilson's critique from the long line of critics who have entered the lists before him to criticize the Enlightenment for reducing society to a series of contracts between otherwise isolated individuals.

The image of an "atomistic, individualistic rights- and contract-centered" Enlightenment plays a central role, as Knud Haakonssen has recently observed, in "the demonology put forward by the latter-day critics of modernity." Unfortunately for these critics, the image bears little relationship to what Enlightenment thinkers actually wrote. Reflecting on the results of his examination of Enlightenment natural law theories, Haakonssen concludes that

the modern idea of individual, subjective rights and, more generally, liberal individualism are not central to Enlightenment philosophy. In its moral aspect, that philosophy is dominated by ideas of duty derived from a basic natural or moral law. It is a philosophy that is much closer to a traditionalist, hierarchical social ethics than it is to the individualistic rights-based liberalism that is said to characterize modernity.²

That such a philosophy "had only modest room for either natural rights or for contractual accounts of moral institutions" is largely lost on those critics of the Enlightenment who have difficulty naming an "Enlightenment thinker" other than Rousseau, Smith, Hume, or Kant—thinkers who, because they were not as wedded to the conventions of their times as most of their contemporaries, stand apart from an Enlightenment that owed a good deal more to tradition than its critics may be aware.³

In constructing an Enlightenment that is the carrier of all the tendencies he wishes to question, Wilson joins a long-standing tradition. To a remarkable

degree, the identity of the Enlightenment has been the creature of its critics. As Peter Gay pointed out several decades ago, the very definition of enlightenment in the *Oxford English Dictionary*—"shallow and pretentious intellectualism, unreasonable contempt for authority and tradition"—amounts to a collection of "most current prejudices."⁴ Karl Popper, reflecting on this same peculiar definition, notes that these prejudices are not new: they can be traced back at least as far as the Enlightenment's romantic critics.⁵ Indeed, a good deal of this line of critique was already in place by the time of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and the Sciences*, which—as Norman Hampson has observed—"preceded most of the major works of the Enlightenment itself."⁶

Critics of the Enlightenment typically begin either by noting a suitably appalling current practice, which is then linked to what is alleged to be a questionable principle (e.g., condoms in the classroom are a consequence of an overemphasis on rights), or by examining a questionable principle, which the critic then illustrates with a particularly grating example (read in this way, those condoms in the classroom that have so exercised Wilson are simply a rhetorical strategy for illustrating a broader concern: the pervasiveness of "rights talk" in modern liberalism). Once the link between dubious principle and appalling example has been made, the critic typically proceeds to argue that this principle is the legacy of something called "the Enlightenment project": a set of intentions, originating in the eighteenth century, that still work mischief two centuries later (thus, liberal "rights talk" is only the most recent manifestation of the Enlightenment's "individualism" and "atomism," and its habit of reducing all human relationships to contracts between isolated individuals). Alert readers perhaps will have noticed by now that nowhere in this process is it necessary for a critic of the Enlightenment to devote much time to the study of eighteenth-century thinkers.

Critiques of the Enlightenment thus rest on two moves. The critic must first select, from among the myriad contesting visions of morality and politics that populate the eighteenth century, a set of ideals and aspirations (allegedly still active today) that constitute the "Enlightenment project." Once this project has been identified, the critic must provide an account of its "failure." This essay suggests that both moves are rather suspect. It argues, with regard to the first of these moves, that critics typically construct the "Enlightenment project" by projecting back onto the eighteenth century the positions they wish to criticize. With regard to the second move, it explores the extent to which criticisms of the "Enlightenment project" tend to draw rather heavily on what Albert O. Hirschman has characterized as the "perversity thesis."⁷ In an effort to draw rhetorically compelling connections between the dreams of the Enlightenment and the nightmares of the twentieth century, otherwise intelli-

gent scholars have wound up making claims about the Enlightenment that border on nonsense.

PROJECTING THE PROJECT

Critics of the Enlightenment assume, not surprisingly, that there is something called “the Enlightenment” to criticize. The confidence with which they approach the task of specifying just what the Enlightenment was (and, by extension, what the Enlightenment project still is) is not shared by those of their colleagues who actually study the period. Dorina Outram has summarized the misgivings that mark recent histories of the Enlightenment quite nicely. She observes,

It might . . . seem that as our picture of the Enlightenment became more complex, as we have begun to study ideas not as autonomous, discrete objects, but as deeply embedded in society, so the term Enlightenment itself might have become increasingly obscure or even meaningless.⁸

While she goes on to argue that matters might not actually be as bad as they seem, Outram’s conclusion that we ought to think of the Enlightenment as “a *capsule* containing sets of debates, stresses and concerns, which however differently formulated or responded to, do appear to be characteristic of the way in which ideas, opinions and social and political structures interacted and changed in the eighteenth century” is still far removed from the notion that we can speak with any confidence of a single, unitary Enlightenment project. While Outram assumes we are dealing with but *one* “capsule,” it is notable that she sees its contents—“sets of debates, stresses and concerns”—as plural. Even more emphatically, J.G.A. Pocock has suggested that we are moving toward a time “in which there will no longer be ‘The Enlightenment,’ a unitary and universal phenomenon with a single history either celebrated or condemned, but instead a family of discourses arising about the same time in a number of European cultures.”⁹ In the face of such a prospect, those who continue to speak of “the Enlightenment” would do well to reconcile themselves to the fact that it had a number of projects going, not all of which necessarily got along very well with each other.

Critics of the Enlightenment would appear to have a professional interest in overlooking this. The Enlightenment project is largely a projection of the Enlightenment’s critics, a projection that fastens onto a few thinkers or tendencies within a broader period and, having offered an account of what it sees as the failings of these thinkers or these tendencies, prides itself on having

demonstrated the failure of the entire age.¹⁰ Such a projection is most easily accomplished when there are few, if any, proper names in the account and, among those few, only the most familiar ones. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno began *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with a quotation from Voltaire hailing Bacon as the “father of experimental philosophy,” but subsequent references to specific Enlightenment thinkers are few and far between: only in the book’s “Second Excursus,” devoted to the unlikely pairing of Kant and the Marquis de Sade, is there a protracted discussion of eighteenth-century thinkers.¹¹ William Ophuls constructs an account of the “political tragedy of the Enlightenment” that reduces Enlightenment political thought to a series of variations on Hobbes.¹² Lawrence Birken’s bizarre attempt to present Adolf Hitler as a “philosophe” steadfastly avoids an actual discussion of the work of any of the philosophes.¹³ In John Gray’s tour of the “ruins of the Enlightenment project,” the only advocates of the project identified by name are Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Kant, and Gibbon, with none discussed in any detail.¹⁴ Wilson mentions a few well-known figures in passing—“Newton, Locke, Kant, Voltaire, Hume, and Adam Smith”—but then hesitates, for a moment recognizing that there are difficulties in saying just what it was that bound these thinkers together into a single movement:

The Enlightenment in the West meant many things, and some thinkers embraced one aspect but not another. For most, it meant rationalism (but David Hume criticized reason and explored the sentiments); for some it meant optimism about human nature (but Voltaire was wickedly skeptical about many human qualities); for still others it meant science (but Rousseau was hardly a friend of science).¹⁵

However, the insight that there might be a number of different projects at work does not deter Wilson from the task at hand and he soldiers on, stating that he is “less interested in these differences than in what its spokesmen had in common,” which—drawing on Henry May’s *Enlightenment in America*—boils down to “a belief that man could be understood by the use of our natural faculties and without relying on ancient custom or revealed religion.” Perhaps an account of the defining characteristics of the Enlightenment could be constructed around this compact characterization, but Wilson rapidly offers a list of what he sees as a set of “shared corollaries” to this belief: “a commitment to skeptical reason, personal freedom, and self-expression” as opposed to “communalism, tradition, and self-control.”¹⁶ With these corollaries in place, Wilson patches together his own version of that “papier-mâché Enlightenment” (to use Haakonssen’s apt description), which is defined by its “atomistic, individualistic rights- and contract-centered moral thought.”¹⁷

Readers may have noticed that some of the thinkers invoked in these descriptions of the Enlightenment project—for example, Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes—are not typically treated by historians as part of the Enlightenment. Utility trumps chronology: certain thinkers prove irresistible to critics of the Enlightenment project because they offer more forceful formulations of what are assumed to be central components of the project than can typically be found among thinkers whose work falls more squarely within the historical Enlightenment. Bacon is irreplaceable as an advocate for the scientific domination of nature, Hobbes is priceless as a representative of that individualist, rights- and contract-centered theory that critics assume lies at the heart of Enlightenment political thought, and Descartes serves as the epitome of that foundationalist and subject-centered conception of reason that philosophers have spent most of this century dismantling. It seems to have escaped critics of the Enlightenment that Hobbes's account of the social contract was one of the more popular whipping boys of Enlightenment moralists and natural law theorists, that the appropriation of Descartes within the Enlightenment was complex and often quite critical, and that Bacon died in 1626. But then critics of the Enlightenment have often played fast and loose with chronological boundaries: Allan Bloom seems to regard Machiavelli as a founder of the Enlightenment, while Horkheimer and Adorno, notoriously, began the whole story with Odysseus.¹⁸ Such epochal generosity simplifies the task facing critics of the Enlightenment project. Because there is already an extensive critical literature on the dangers of an unrestrained domination of nature, the shortcomings of social contract theory, and the limitations of Cartesian rationality, all one needs to do in order to turn these arguments into a critique of the Enlightenment project is to make Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes the spokesmen for (or, should a recognition of the implausibility of that designation become too obvious to ignore, the “forefathers” or “founders” of) this project.

On those rare occasions when a critic of the Enlightenment project actually engages an eighteenth-century thinker at any length, it tends to be Kant. For example, feminist critiques of Enlightenment universalism habitually take Kant's moral philosophy as their point of departure, while Berel Lang's discussion of the relationship between the Enlightenment and Nazi genocide centers on a discussion of Kant's conception of enlightenment.¹⁹ The reasons for the attention devoted to Kant are not far to seek. Kant is, after all, far better known than Wolff, Garve, Mendelssohn, Reinhold, Eberhard, Engel, Feder, Nicolai, Platner, or the other thinkers who were more typical representatives of the *Aufklärung* in Germany, and—as in the case of Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes—there is a readily available critical literature that can be pressed into service. Furthermore, his moral philosophy, with its emphasis on

the themes of universalism, autonomy, and self-legislation, is tailor-made for critics seeking to arraign the Enlightenment on the familiar charges of arid intellectualism and abstract individualism. Finally, Kant was the author of that famous little essay, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?"—which can all too easily serve as *the* manifesto of the Enlightenment project, especially for those critics of the Enlightenment who have not bothered to look at the many *other* answers to the question "What is Enlightenment?" that appeared in Prussia during the 1780s and who thus remain blissfully unaware of the degree to which Kant's definition of Enlightenment represented a significant departure from those of his contemporaries.²⁰

For these reasons, what is advertised as a critique of the Enlightenment project many times turns out to involve little more than a repackaging of well-worn criticisms of Kantian moral philosophy. Consider Lang's attempt to demonstrate that "the ideational framework" which supported Nazi genocide "involved—*required*—a number of concepts that had been central to Enlightenment thought." Having offered Kant as "a representative or typical" Enlightenment thinker, Lang—like Wilson—has a moment of trepidation, admitting that "it may well be that the Enlightenment is too diverse in its commitments and methods to afford a single exemplary spokesman at all." Yet, like Wilson, Lang presses on unchastened:

Even granting this complexity, however, the themes identified . . . in Kant's thought can be seen to recur, whether explicitly or as presupposition, in other Enlightenment formulations, and it is impossible to identify or to describe the Enlightenment without reference to them. Among these themes, the impulse for universalization, with its implications for "practical"—i.e., moral and social—judgment and for the theory of human nature, is conceptually fundamental.

But no sooner is this "fundamental" Enlightenment notion identified than Lang admits that "there is nothing distinctive philosophically in the Enlightenment conception of a universal or essential human nature by itself." So, he tries again, and finally comes to rest with the claim that what "*is* distinctive" and "exemplary of Enlightenment thought" is the use of universalization "as both a substantive and a formal ground":

On the one hand, persons or moral agents are defined in terms of certain common or universal characteristics; on the other hand, the test of any particular ethical judgment is whether it can be universalized. The rights of the individual—what the individual expects from others—thus depends on the recognition (from both sides: within the agent himself and in his judgment of the other individual) of a universal self.²¹

This attempt to specify the uniqueness of the Enlightenment would seem, however, to have carried us back to the very start of the argument, since the definition of “*the Enlightenment*” that is offered turns out, upon closer examination, to be simply an account of the central features of *Kant’s* moral philosophy.

Critiques of the Enlightenment project thus rest on an act of projection in which unpleasant features of our own time are explained as the consequences of certain general principles whose ultimate origins are located in a particular eighteenth-century thinker or group of thinkers who are stipulated as representative of the Enlightenment. It is doubtful that such projections can tell us much about the problems of our own time, since the explanations offered capriciously assign causal agency to conceptual abstractions. (One might ponder why the “culture of rights” that Wilson sees as the legacy of the Enlightenment is allegedly so effective in placing condoms in fourth-grade classrooms—a project that even Wilson must realize had few advocates in the eighteenth century—yet so ineffective, at least in the United States, in abolishing capital punishment, a cause that some of the philosophes did advocate.) It is certain that they tell us little about the Enlightenment. The difficult historical task of sifting through the various overlapping and diverging commitments that animated eighteenth-century thought in order to clarify what the Enlightenment might have meant to those who lived through it is eschewed in favor of a quick roundup of a few of the usual suspects. It remains for us to examine how those unfortunate thinkers who have been selected are found guilty.

JEOPARDY, FUTILITY, AND PERVERSITY

Having selected a thinker or group of thinkers representative of the Enlightenment project, the critic needs next to explain how this project went awry. For this account to be compelling, a failure of a rather specific sort is required. A demonstration that the ideals articulated in the project (e.g., a commitment to religious toleration or to political equality) were not realized in practice is not enough. Such a failure allows the Enlightenment to survive as an “unfinished project,” ready to be taken up by subsequent generations. Rather, the critic must show that the Enlightenment project carries the seeds of its own destruction within it. Thus, it is the *success* of the Enlightenment project that seals its failure, rendering foolhardy any attempt to continue down the path it has opened.

In sorting out the ways in which critics of the Enlightenment have framed such arguments, much can be learned from Hirschman’s typology of reac-

tionary rhetoric. Reviewing responses to the French Revolution, the extension of the suffrage, and the rise of the welfare state, Hirschman distinguishes three typical forms that reactionary arguments take. The first of these arguments, dubbed by Hirschman the "perversity thesis," suggests that attempts at transforming society run the risk of producing effects that are the opposite of those intended. The lesson Edmund Burke drew from the French Revolution—that "certain attempts to reach for liberty are bound to lead to tyranny instead"—serves, for Hirschman, as the paradigm for this argument.²² The "futility thesis" argues, in contrast, that attempts to transform societies will bring about a change that is "largely surface, facade, cosmetic, hence illusory, as the 'deep' structures of society remain wholly untouched."²³ The locus classicus for this argument, as applied to the French Revolution, is de Tocqueville's well-known argument that the French Revolution represented not a break with the Ancien Régime but rather its consummation. Finally, the "jeopardy thesis" argues that "the proposed change, though perhaps desirable in itself, involves unacceptable costs or consequences" and thus threatens to "*endanger* an older, highly prized one that, moreover, may have only recently been put into place."²⁴ Hirschman maintains that while this argument was deployed against the extension of suffrage (in the argument that mass democracy might pose a threat to recently won individual liberties) and against the welfare state (in the argument that it might endanger both individual liberty and democratic norms), the jeopardy thesis was not invoked against the French Revolution because "the revolutionary events came with such speed and swept away pre-existing structures with such thoroughness that there was literally no time to determine whether there was something worth saving in the Ancien Régime."²⁵ Hirschman may, however, have overlooked one possible representative of this form of argument, perhaps because he was already used to illustrate the perversity thesis: Burke.

As Pocock has suggested in a number of essays, Burke's critique of the French Revolution was animated by a fear that the forces it had set in motion threatened to undermine the reform of manners and in governance that laid the groundwork for a civilized and commercially viable society in England. Burke held, Pocock argues, that "civilized society is the prerequisite of exchange relations, and that the latter cannot create the former":

He insists that commerce can flourish only under the protection of manners, and that manners require the pre-eminence of religion and nobility, the natural protectors of society. To overthrow religion and nobility, therefore, is to destroy the possibility of commerce itself.²⁶

Thus, Burke's description of the events at Versailles of October 6, 1789, culminates "in the lament for the fall of the age of chivalry, though the emotional vehemence of this passage rendered it hard for even contemporaries to understand, it is at bottom a lament for the destruction of enlightened manners."²⁷ As an "old Whig" addressing the new ones, Burke's critique of the French Revolution defends a certain understanding of the Enlightenment—which saw the achievement of political liberty as dependent on a particular reform of mores in which respect for religion and deference to nobility continued to play a crucial role—against a more radical vision of Enlightenment that threatened to overthrow all that had been achieved.²⁸

Criticisms of the Enlightenment that employ the jeopardy thesis turn out to be quite common in the eighteenth century and are not confined to thinkers typically classed as part of the "counter-Enlightenment." The debates within the Berlin "Wednesday Society" on the need for reform in censorship regulations—the discussion that formed the impetus for the discussion of the question "What is Enlightenment?" in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*—took the form of a dispute between those (such as the publicist Nicolai and the philosopher Mendelssohn) who saw no harm in a loosening of censorship and those enlightened reformers within the Prussian Department of Justice who felt that too rapid an enlightenment of the citizenry might threaten what had already been achieved.²⁹ In our own day, Wilson's criticisms of the "Enlightenment project" would appear to draw at least in part on this rhetorical gesture. He voices admiration for the Enlightenment's role in enlarging "the scope of human freedom," promoting "the scientific method," and strengthening "the sense of sympathy and fairness." The desire to create "a world in which people faced a career open to talents and a political system in which they participated" is described as "worthy." The problem lies with the tendency—which he suggests is a feature of "most" worthy desires—"to carry matters to an extreme" and thus to jeopardize what has already been achieved.³⁰

The rhetorical advantage of the jeopardy thesis resides, Hirschman notes, in its allowing the critic to grant that proposed reforms are desirable in the abstract (permitting the critic, if only for a moment, to adopt the guise of a progressive) but to argue that these proposed reforms will threaten hard-won progress should they be put into practice.³¹ Such a critique implies that it is chiefly *further* enlightenment (or "*excessive* enlightenment") that is dangerous. What has been already secured is well worth protecting—and worth protecting, above all, from attempts to push enlightenment "too far." Such a critique does not seek to roll back the Enlightenment but rather to secure, and thus to conserve, what has already been achieved. It seeks to end the Enlightenment as a project by converting it into a tradition.

While examples of the jeopardy thesis pervade eighteenth-century discussions of the advisability of enlightenment, it is more difficult to find examples of the futility thesis, since the Enlightenment's contemporary critics typically began with the assumption that the Enlightenment had a decisive (if unfortunate) impact on European society. There is, however, at least one well-known twentieth-century example of this argument: Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*. Just as de Tocqueville sought to demonstrate that the French Revolution represented less of a break with the world of the Ancien Régime than was traditionally assumed, so Becker sought to show that "the *Philosophes* were nearer the Middle Ages, less emancipated from the preconceptions of medieval Christian thought, than they quite realized or we have commonly supposed."³² The peculiar mixture of weary disillusionment and ironic detachment that commentators have found in Becker's lecture tends to be a regular feature of the futility thesis, whose peculiar appeal rests, Hirschman suggests, "on the remarkable feat of contradicting, often with obvious relish, the commonsense understanding of these events as replete with upheaval, change, or real reform."³³ While those who argue along the lines of the jeopardy thesis must passionately resist further Enlightenment because it might mean the undoing of all that has been achieved, those who argue from the futility thesis know better: despite all the noise and tumult, nothing of substantial importance has changed.³⁴

For this reason, it is misleading to characterize those who have deployed the futility thesis against the Enlightenment as "conservative" in the sense that Burke is.³⁵ Burke argued for arresting further Enlightenment and for defending what had been achieved. But consider George W. F. Hegel's discussion of the struggle between "faith" and "Enlightenment" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³⁶ Enlightenment, according to Hegel, wins an easy, but ultimately empty, victory. What it denounces as religion turns out to be nothing but an impoverished notion of faith that has little resemblance to what believers actually believe, and the victorious Enlightenment reveals itself to be only a faith of a different sort: a faith in the power of reason. Where Burke saw the need to defend traditional forms of religious belief from the onslaught of "naked reason," Hegel concludes that the game—on both sides—has already been lost.

Hegel's account of the Enlightenment does not, however, end with this invocation of the futility thesis. The account of "Absolute Freedom and Terror" with which this section of the *Phenomenology* concludes presents us with a classic example of the perversity thesis. The Enlightenment's attempt to create a world in which all institutions would be measured against the standard of rational utility culminates in a "fury of destruction" in which mankind is forced to submit to the most unrelenting of masters: death.³⁷ In the dialectic of faith and Enlightenment, enlightened reason seeks to rid the world of reli-

gion, and appears to succeed, but in fact changes nothing. In the dialectic of absolute freedom and terror, reason attempts to create a new set of institutions that would realize the ideas of the Enlightenment but succeeds in creating an unmitigated disaster. These two episodes from the *Phenomenology* could serve as a primer on the differences between the futility and the perversity theses.

While Hirschman maintains that an attempt to rank the historical importance of these three forms of reactionary argument "is not a particularly meaningful exercise," he suggests that were one to attempt such a ranking, "the perversity claim would probably be pronounced the 'winner' as the single most popular and effective weapon in the annals of reactionary rhetoric."³⁸ Indeed, its appeal to critics of the Enlightenment is considerable. Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* begins with a classic formulation of the perversity argument: "Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."³⁹ That their attempt to demonstrate that the Enlightenment "already contains the seed of the regression apparent everywhere today"⁴⁰ should be cast in the same form of argument as the *Phenomenology* should come as no surprise: Horkheimer once described the book as an attempt to trace out the same process that Hegel had been mapping.⁴¹ What is more surprising is the appeal of this pattern of argument for an anti-Hegelian and antidialectical thinker such as Michel Foucault. Examples of the argument pervade his work. In *Madness and Civilization*, the eighteenth-century reformers who enter into the prisons to separate criminals from the insane wind up subjecting the insane to an "endless trial for which the asylum furnished simultaneously police, magistrates, and torturers."⁴² When the light of reason enters the dark interior of the body in search of life, in *Birth of the Clinic*, it finds only death. And, in perhaps Foucault's most famous account of a reversal of the hopes of the Enlightenment, *Discipline and Punish* provides an unforgettable image of prisoners freed from the darkness of the dungeon only to be captured all the more securely in the light that floods through the Panopticon.⁴³

The unique appeal of the perversity argument lies in the fact that, if successful, it implies that efforts at reform are not simply futile or risky but are instead assured of bringing about results diametrically opposed to what was intended. Yet, at the risk of muddying Hirschman's distinctions, we find quite frequently that critiques of the Enlightenment project posed initially in the form of the perversity thesis turn, when scrutinized further, into one of the other two forms of argument. The lesson of the perversity thesis, Hirschman argues, is that "attempts to reach for liberty will make society sink into slavery, the quest for democracy will produce oligarchy and tyranny, and social

welfare programs will create more, rather than less, poverty. *Everything backfires.*"⁴⁴ But if such an argument is pressed, it may turn out that the explanation for the reversal of intentions lies not in the general wisdom that "everything backfires" but in an explanation that is cast in the form of either the jeopardy thesis or the futility thesis. This may account for why I have presented Burke as invoking a version of the jeopardy thesis, while Hirschman uses him to illustrate the perversity thesis.

Certainly, there are many arguments in Burke that are cast in the form of the perversity thesis. Consider the following passage:

If this monster of a constitution can continue, France will be wholly governed by the agitators in corporations, by societies in the towns formed of directors of assignats, and trustees for the sale of church lands, attorneys, agents, money jobbers, speculators, and adventurers, composing an ignoble oligarchy founded on the destruction of the crown, the church, the nobility, and the people. Here end all the deceitful dreams and visions of the equality and rights of men. In the Serbonian bog of this base oligarchy they are all absorbed, sunk, and lost forever.⁴⁵

The argument that the attempt to realize "equality and rights of men" yields the "Serbonian bog" of an "ignoble oligarchy" provides one of Hirschman's illustrations of the perversity thesis. But if we ask why this reversal takes place (and look more closely at the particular individuals who comprise this "ignoble oligarchy"), we see that it is because the attempt to realize this goal undermined a set of institutions (most important, an established church) and a set of attitudes (industrious and moderate commercial activity) that had been the mainstays of civilized society.⁴⁶ Thus, at least in this case, the explanation for the reversal of intentions postulated by the perversity thesis is provided by the jeopardy thesis. The latter does the actual work in this account.⁴⁷

For an example of a perversity argument that ultimately rests on a futility argument, we might consider Hegel's account in the *Phenomenology* of the relation between Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Absolute freedom breeds Terror, Hegel argues, because the abstract conception of liberty that the French Revolution embraced founders on the contradiction between "*individual* and the *universal* consciousness."⁴⁸ In the fatal dialectic that unfolds, any attempt by the individual consciousness to maintain itself apart from the universal consciousness—whether in the form of membership in a particular estate or class, representation in a particular branch of a government divided into legislative, judicial, and executive branches, or even as an appeal to a spiritual "beyond" that grants some sort of dignity to the individual person—is relentlessly crushed.⁴⁹ Hegel sees this abstract opposition of individuality and universality as the consequence of the ultimately empty concept of "utility" against which the Enlightenment measures everything in the world.

The origins of this project are, in turn, to be found in the account of the fruitless struggle between faith and Enlightenment.⁵⁰

But what would a perversity argument look like that did not, when pressed, turn into one of the other forms? It would have to attribute the reversal of reformist intentions neither to a failure to overcome a prevailing arrangement of affairs nor to an undermining of the prerequisites on which any future progress would rest. To be convincing, such an explanation would have to explain the reversal as a result of unintended consequences of collective actions or as a consequence of unanticipated implications of certain ideals that become apparent only in their implementation. A critique of the Enlightenment might possibly be mounted along these lines, but all too often, accounts of the failure of the Enlightenment project that are cast in the form of perversity theses have rather little in the way of supporting arguments of any sort. Lang's claim that the Enlightenment provided the "conceptual structure presupposed in the phenomenon of the Nazi genocide" can serve as an example of an account that dissolves into incoherence upon closer examination.

The explanation Lang offers cannot be recast in the form of either the jeopardy thesis or the futility thesis. While Lang does suggest that the "Aristotelian conception" of political community offered a more "pluralist view" that, in his view, is not susceptible to the same "affiliation" with genocide as Enlightenment approaches, he apparently does not intend to argue that the Enlightenment, by undermining Aristotelian approaches, laid the foundation for genocide.⁵¹ Nor does Lang seem to be advancing a variant of the futility thesis by suggesting that, because it failed to transform European society, the Enlightenment left in place a structure of religious prejudices and intolerance that would, a century and a half later, result in Nazi anti-Semitism.⁵² Instead, Lang argues that the Enlightenment ideal of religious toleration (which, as noted in the previous section, is defined exclusively in terms of Kant) paradoxically creates a "conceptual structure" that has an "affiliation" with Nazi genocide.⁵³

Lang is, of course, aware that certain formulations of the Categorical Imperative (e.g., "act so as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in another, always at the same time as an end, and never simply as a means") would appear, on first glance, to rule out slave labor camps, the extermination of ethnic groups, or the processing of human bodies as raw material. Indeed, in order to frame the argument in the form of the perversity thesis, it is imperative that the Enlightenment initially appear as utterly opposed to genocide. The trick is to show that there is a fatal weakness within the Enlightenment project that brings about a state of affairs opposite of what had been projected. For Lang, this weakness is found in what would initially appear to be the Categorical Imperative's greatest strength: its insistence on the funda-

mental equality of all moral agents. Lang argues that the notion that all moral agents are equal can easily turn into a demand that individuals prove themselves worthy of being treated as equal by putting aside all particularity. Those who do not—or those who are judged by others as incapable of rising above particularity—forefeit their rights to be treated as equal. Thus, “What starts out as a commitment to tolerance turns out to be, not acceptance of diversity in its own terms, but a tolerance of difference within the margins fixed by a stipulated conception of reason.”⁵⁴

The key to understanding this perversion of the Enlightenment lies in the concept of the self that Lang finds at its heart:

The abstract, ahistorical self posited by the Enlightenment as an ideal of humanity entails in its converse appearance the implication that historical difference (and all the more, an historical definition of identity) will be suspect; the principle of universal reason or judgment implies that the grounds on which such distinctions are based may be—should be—challenged: not only can everyone be judged by the one criterion, but the consequences of being included or excluded by it are, in terms of the principle of universalizability, without limits. The “difference” of the Jews was judged by the Nazis to be fundamental—and with this decision, there was nothing to inhibit the decision subsequently made about what followed from that judgment: there was no “reason” *not* to destroy the difference.⁵⁵

Much happens in this passage, and it happens rather quickly. The argument runs as follows: (1) the Enlightenment (which for Lang, as we have already seen, means Kant) posits an abstract, ahistorical concept of the self; (2) as a consequence (or, as Lang would have it, “in its converse appearance”), notions of individual identity that rest on historical claims are suspect; (3) because such claims are suspect, they “may be—should be—challenged”; (4) how far this “challenging” might be pursued is, thanks to the principle of universalizability, “without limits”; thus, (5) there is “no ‘reason’” why a “challenging” of claims involving “difference” should not go all the way and take the form of a destruction of those who make these claims—which is what the Nazis did. Thus, there is an “affiliation” between Enlightenment ideals (i.e., Kantian universalism) and “the structural presuppositions of the phenomenon of genocide.”⁵⁶

There are a number of problems with this argument. With regard to Lang’s first point, Kant hardly can be said to have ignored the historical dimensions of selfhood (e.g., see his *Anthropology*), and indeed much of his moral philosophy explores the tensions between the two standpoints we, as creatures who perceive ourselves to be free to order our own actions yet who also recognize that our actions are determined by external forces, can, at any time, take toward ourselves.⁵⁷ This will mean, as Lang notes in point two, that historically based identity claims can be called into question; for example, the

notion that individuals necessarily enjoy certain privileges because of accidents of birth or blood is clearly suspect for Kant. But it does not follow that *all* the contingent and historically based factors that go into making up one's identity need to be discarded. Kant's account of moral deliberation does not rule out the possibility that some of our maxims (i.e., subjective principles of volition, some of which may be rooted in historically based notions of who we are) are capable of being universalized without contradiction. It is thus conceivable that many of the projects we pursue (including some resting on historically based assumptions about who we are) will be morally unproblematic. Lang's argument is aided by the unwarranted leap that takes place at point four. "Universalizability" for Kant involves an attempt to determine whether the particular maxim we have adopted can be consistently taken up by everyone else or whether this maxim requires us to make an exception of ourselves, and thus apply a rule to ourselves that cannot, without contradiction, be willed by others. At point four, Lang redefines "universalizability" as "applied without limits" (which misses Kant's point, since an idiosyncratic maxim, incapable of universalization, could be "applied without limits" by an agent with a tolerance for inconsistency) and then proceeds to step five, where genocide is offered as a case of the application "without limits" of the principle of "challenging" historically based notions of identity. With this move, the difference between questioning whether an individual's action represents a case of exception taking and the slaughter of individuals who are viewed as "different" has been effaced.

It is unclear how Lang wishes us to understand the relationship between the Enlightenment and Nazi genocide, a point that is driven home by the term that he employs to define the relationship. "Affiliation," he explains, denotes a relationship that is "stronger than analogy or likeness, although more oblique than . . . direct physical causality."⁵⁸ The relationship between Enlightenment and genocide seems to come down to this: by providing "ahistorical" definitions of the terms "human" and "rational," the Enlightenment left "an opening . . . for a definition and for the moral implications to be drawn from it, which is at best arbitrary in its practical application and at worst, as in the Nazi definition, a pretext used to conceal other purposes."⁵⁹ Lang insists that he is arguing for something more than the claim that there is "no inconsistency" between the ideals of the Enlightenment and the practice of genocide. He also states that the relationship of "affiliation" is not the same thing as "direct physical causality." But is it possible to claim some other sort of causality between Enlightenment and genocide? Is Lang suggesting that there are patterns of influence that might be reconstructed? Once we begin to ask these sorts of questions, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine what Lang is actually claiming. He grants that nineteenth-century biological race

theories would appear to have a more direct connection to Nazi genocide than Kant and the Enlightenment but goes on to suggest:

It seems clear, for example, that the direction taken by nineteenth-century biological theory, concluding in theories of evolution, racial differentiation, and genetic transmission, was indebted to the Enlightenment ideal of history as progressive—an ideal itself linked to the connection of a developing and potential universal reason.⁶⁰

If *this* is what the “affiliation” between Enlightenment and genocide boils down to, then all that Lang has shown is that Nazi conceptions of race were inspired by nineteenth-century discussions of evolution, which in turn owed something to eighteenth-century conceptions of history and of rationality. But what is probably most important for understanding the genesis of Nazi genocide is not how the Enlightenment inspired Darwin but, rather, how Darwinian evolutionary theory was pressed into the service of Nazi anti-Semitism.

It is also worth considering the arguments that Lang offers when stating that a thinker is *not* “affiliated” with Nazi genocide. Lang is aware that many of the same claims that he has made about the “affiliation” between the Enlightenment and genocide could be made with regard to the influence of Nietzsche on Nazi race theory. Indeed, Lang grants that it was Nietzsche, not Kant, who was regularly cited by Nazi race theorists. But this, he argues, is a case of “misappropriation” rather than “affiliation”:

To be sure, misappropriation has causal consequences no less certainly than does affiliation, and, again, there is no certain line between the two. But for Nietzsche’s historical aftermath, what is at issue is an instance of misappropriation, not of deduction and not even, in the term proposed here, of affiliation. Far from being entailed by the premises underlying Nietzsche’s position, the conclusions drawn are inconsistent with them. To reconstruct in the imagination the events leading up to the Nazi genocide against the Jews without the name or presence of Nietzsche is to be compelled to change almost nothing else in that pattern. This contrasts sharply with the results of the same experiment as it might be applied to a number of other ideas and thinkers whose absence would entail significant revisions in the process of Enlightenment affiliation—even, perhaps in its eventual outcome.⁶¹

Once again, it is difficult to determine what Lang has actually accomplished. He argues that Nazi genocide was not “entailed” by Nietzsche’s position—but surely the same is true of the Enlightenment. Nazi genocide is “inconsistent,” he insists, with Nietzsche’s views; but, again, the same claim can be made for the Enlightenment. Why, then (despite the fact that there is “no certain line” between “misappropriation” and “affiliation”), does Lang insist that Nietzsche’s use by Nazi ideologues was a “misappropriation” while, despite repeated Nazi denunciations of the Enlightenment and the ideals associated

with it, there was an “affiliation” between the Enlightenment and genocide? Because, Lang claims, it is possible to reconstruct, in a thought experiment, the path that leads to genocide in the absence of Nietzsche, but it is impossible to do this if one removes “a number of other ideas and thinkers” associated with the Enlightenment. But because Lang has already constructed an account of the path leading to Nazi genocide that implicates the Enlightenment and excuses Nietzsche, it is hardly surprising that removing certain Enlightenment thinkers and ideas from the account “would entail significant revisions in the process of Enlightenment affiliation.” Were there no Nietzsche, an account that explained genocide in terms of an “affiliation” with Enlightenment ideas would still be possible. Were there no Enlightenment, it would be impossible. But does this really tell us anything at all?

In the end, what counts as “misappropriation” and as “affiliation” would seem to depend on how careful a hearing the accused is given. Lang acquits Nietzsche of any direct responsibility by arguing that his conception of the *Übermensch* was neither racial nor inheritable and by noting that Nietzsche criticized anti-Semites. Lang convicts the Enlightenment of an “affiliation” with Nazi genocide because similar exculpatory evidence (e.g., Kant’s prohibition on the treatment of individuals as mere means to other ends) either does not count or—“in its converse appearance”—is said to produce consequences that are the opposite of what was intended. The perversity argument, at least in this case, works best when the discussion of the intentions that have been perverted and the process that perverts them are kept as vague as possible.

ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF HISTORY IN THE SERVICE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Many criticisms of the “Enlightenment project” are directed at an object that is, at best, underdefined and provide accounts of the reversal of this project that, for the most part, rehearse well-worn patterns of reactionary rhetoric. Such accounts neither clarify what Enlightenment thinkers were attempting to do nor provide much insight into the genesis of the more recent events that they pretend to be explain. They succeed as explanations only to the extent that they are able to invoke unexpected and rhetorically compelling connections between the dreams of the Enlightenment and the nightmares of our own time, which may explain the peculiar charm that the perversity thesis has for critics of the Enlightenment. Nothing, it would appear, is more enticing than the prospect of showing that the results of the Enlightenment project are exactly the opposite of what was intended.

Hirschman notes, however, that the three forms of argument he discusses are not the exclusive possessions of critics of attempts at reform. Defenders of reform can easily spring rhetorical tricks that are closely related to those of their opponents. Reversing the jeopardy thesis by substituting the "more cheerful idea" of "mutual support" for the assumption of incompatibility between past achievements and projected reforms, advocates of reform have sometimes argued that further reforms are necessary to *secure* previously achieved advances.⁶² Progressives also have their own variant of the futility thesis, which, like the reactionary version of the thesis, appeals to invariant laws of society, but which sees these laws as dictating the inevitability of historical progress and, as a consequence, the historical inevitability of the progressive's favored reforms. Finally, Hirschman suggests that the perversity thesis also allows for a reformulation which argues that the current situation has created such a desperate predicament that it is necessary to press ahead with reforms "*regardless* of any counterproductive consequences that might ensue." The invocation of the desperate nature of the current situation "can therefore be seen as a rhetorical maneuver of escalation meant to neutralize and override the argument of the perverse effect."⁶³

Some of the examples of the perversity thesis discussed here suggest that there is a way that advocates of Enlightenment have made use of the thesis which differs from the examples cited by Hirschman. In arguing that "the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant," Horkheimer and Adorno deployed a classic version of the perversity thesis. But their intent in doing so was not to condemn the Enlightenment but to "rescue" it from what it had become.⁶⁴ A crucial part of this attempted rescue was the conviction that the critique of what the Enlightenment had become could not be left to its enemies alone.⁶⁵ To a greater degree than the other two reactionary arguments, the perversity thesis has been employed by defenders of the goals of the Enlightenment. Having examined the process by which the Enlightenment negates itself, friends of the Enlightenment can attempt to isolate the factor that accounts for the frustration of the Enlightenment's intentions. In the case of Horkheimer and Adorno, the fatal flaw of the Enlightenment is said to reside in its reliance on instrumental forms of rationality to the exclusion of other forms of reasoning. A similar form of this argument can be found in the late work of Foucault. Having made a career arguing that attempts at enlightened and humanitarian reforms regularly result only in increased control over the individuals in whose name these reforms were carried out, late in his life Foucault announced his own commitment to a version of the Enlightenment project that would explore the question "How can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?"⁶⁶

It is important to note, however, that defenses of the Enlightenment project of this sort may well be no more convincing than the attacks on the Enlightenment to which they respond. As in the case of critics, the Enlightenment project under discussion tends to be a construct that bears scant resemblance to anything that might have passed for enlightenment in the eighteenth century. For its defenders, as for its critics, the Enlightenment project is a projection, which tells us more about the need to wrap current commitments in the mantle of historical legitimacy than it does about the relationship of our thought to that of the eighteenth century. In the face of attacks on the Enlightenment, a more sensible course of action might be to refuse to play the game at all and to recognize that the dilemmas that face us today may be different than those that concerned thinkers in the eighteenth century. While some of our problems have origins that might be traced back historically to the Enlightenment, it is by no means obvious that an attempt to reconstruct their history is always the most effective way of addressing them.

Thus, the point of attempts to trace the historical genesis of current problems may lie less in the links that are established than in the alleged connections that are dismantled. A history of the Enlightenment that remained alert to the fact that, however intriguing they might be, the philosophes are not our contemporaries might help to inoculate us against the affection for bad history that seems to have gripped both critics and advocates of the Enlightenment project.

NOTES

1. James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 244-45, 250.
2. Knud Haakonssen, "Natural Law and Natural Rights in the Enlightenment," in *Filosofiske Studier Bind 15: Festskrift Tilegnet Professor, Dr. Phil. Karsten Friis Johansen*, ed. Finn Collin, Jan Riis Flor, Carl Henrik Koch, and Peter Sandøe (København: Institut for Filosofi, Pædagogik og Retorik, 1995), 126-27, 134. For an elaboration of this account of Enlightenment moral theory, see Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
3. Haakonssen, "Natural Law and Natural Rights," 133-34.
4. Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity* (New York: Norton, 1971), 263.
5. Karl R. Popper, "Kant's Critique and Cosmology," in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 176.
6. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 187.
7. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 11-42. Hirschman has warned against an overemphasis on the "perversity thesis" to the exclusion of the other forms of reactionary rhetoric he discusses. See "The Rhetoric of Reaction—Two Years Later," in *A Propensity to Self-Subversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 45-68. As will be seen below, while criti-

cisms of the Enlightenment have, at one point or another, exhibited features of the other forms of reactionary rhetoric discussed by Hirschman, the "perversity thesis" has had the greatest appeal for more recent critics.

8. Dorina Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 12. See also the discussion in Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1990), 1-11.

9. J.G.A. Pocock, "Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment," in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1998), 7. This point is elaborated in Pocock, "The Tell-Tale Article: Reconstructing (. . .) Enlightenment," Plenary address to the 29th annual meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, University of Notre Dame, April 2, 1998, which argues that historians would do well to eschew the definite article and to speak of a variety of "enlightenments" rather than "the Enlightenment." Roy Porter's brief overview, *The Enlightenment*, while retaining the definite article, begins by emphasizing the diversity of the movement (see especially pp. 10-11).

10. For a discussion of the related tendency to speak of a "project of modernity," see Bernard Yack, *The Fetishism of Modernities* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 112-19.

11. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). There is a note titled "For Voltaire" among the Notes and Drafts at the end of the book, but it has little to say about Voltaire himself. For an attempt to link this discussion to the eighteenth century, see Christoph Dejung, "Für Voltaire: Bemerkungen zum gleichnamigen Fragment im Anhang der *Dialektik der Aufklärung* von Horkheimer und Adorno," *Studia Philosophica* 51 (1992): 183-202.

12. William Ophuls, *Requiem for Modern Politics: The Tragedy of the Enlightenment and the Challenge of the New Millennium* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). Ophuls's account of the now "moribund" paradigm of liberal politics rests on a brief discussion (pp. 29-42) of Hobbes, Locke, Smith, and Marx (who, in Ophuls' account, "heightens the contradictions of liberalism instead of alleviating them" [p. 42]), all of whom are seen as turning nature into an object that has significance only as a means for satisfying the individual's desire for self-gratification. While Ophuls warns at the start that "the reader must avoid judging this work by the standards appropriate to an academic treatise or scholarly monograph" (p. xii), it is hardly reassuring that the annotated "list of sources" (p. 23) contains not a single work by a historian of the Enlightenment.

13. Lawrence Birken, *Hitler as Philosopher: Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

14. John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995). I have devoted a bit more attention to the problems with Gray's account in "Civility, Enlightenment, and Society: Conceptual Confusions and Kantian Remedies," *American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 419-27.

15. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, 196.

16. *Ibid.*, 197.

17. Haakonssen, "Natural Law and Natural Rights," 134.

18. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 259.

19. Susan Strickland, "Feminism, Postmodernism and Difference," in *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*, ed. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (London: Routledge, 1994), 265-74, and Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 165-206.

20. For a selection of some of these essays, see my collection *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

21. Lang, *Act and Idea*, 179.

22. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, 11-19.

23. *Ibid.*, 43.

24. *Ibid.*, 81-84.

25. *Ibid.*, 139.

26. Pocock, "The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 199.

27. Pocock, "Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Culture*, vol. 3, *The Transformation of Political Culture 1789-1848*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989), 31-32.

28. Hirschman notes later (p. 161) that Burke argued "that existing institutions incorporated a great deal of collective wisdom and that they were, moreover, quite capable of evolving gradually." It is this "collective wisdom" that Burke sees as being jeopardized by the French Revolution.

29. For discussions, see Eckhart Hellmuth, "Aufklärung und Pressefreiheit: Zur Debatte der Berliner Mittwochsgesellschaft während der Jahre 1783 und 1784," *Zeitschrift für historisches Forschung* 9 (1982): 315-45, and my "The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn, and the Mittwochsgesellschaft," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989): 269-91. Kant's 1786 essay "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" closes with an invocation of the jeopardy thesis in which it is suggested that irresponsibility in the use of the freedom of speech that has been granted may undermine this liberty, thus leading to an impoverishment of public reasoning.

30. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, 245.

31. Hirschman, *Rhetoric of Reaction*, 84. It bears mentioning that such fears may not always be ill advised—a point that was recognized in criticisms of the French Revolution originating within the Enlightenment itself.

32. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932), 29.

33. Hirschman, *Rhetoric of Reaction*, 70. Leo Gershoy argues that the tone of Becker's book, "for all its flashes of wit, was somber not insouciant not playful but grim." "The Heavenly City of Carl Becker," in *Carl Becker's Heavenly City Revisited*, ed. Raymond O. Rockwood (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1968), 196. Beatrice F. Hyslop's contribution to this same collection suggests that Becker's stance in the lectures may be explained by the experience of the depression of the 1930s: "His veiled jibes at the naïve optimism of the eighteenth century were destined to strike a responsive chord in the minds of listeners and readers worried about the whole structure of contemporary society" (p. 106), while Ralph H. Bowen sees the book as "an expression of Becker's own disillusionment, not to say despair" (p. 154).

34. Something akin to this stance may be found in Michel Foucault's various "archeologies" of the human sciences, the point of which is often to suggest that what has typically been viewed as a dramatic transformation is, on more careful scrutiny, only a continuation of the same thing. For a discussion of parallels between Foucault and Becker, see Karlis Racevskis, "A Return to *The Heavenly City*: Carl Becker's Paradox in a Structuralist Perspective," *Clio* 8 (1979): 165-74.

35. Compare Gay's claim that "Becker was no conservative, but the conservative implications of *The Heavenly City* are plain" (*The Party of Humanity*, 209).

36. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 328-55.

37. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 359. For a discussion of this passage, see my "Cabbage Heads and Gulps of Water: Hegel on the Terror," *Political Theory* 26 (1998): 4-32.

38. Hirschman, *Rhetoric of Reaction*, 140.

39. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3. For a critique of Horkheimer and Adorno's rhetoric employing Hirschman's typology, see Yack, *The Fetishism of Modernities*, 126-31.

40. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xiii (translation modified).

41. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 17, *Briefwechsel 1941-1948*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1996), 446.

42. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 269.

43. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 195-97, and *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 200-209.

44. Hirschman, *Rhetoric of Reaction*, 12.

45. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 313.

46. I draw here, once again, on Pocock's interpretation. Much the same point can be made about the example of the perversity thesis that Hirschman offers from Adam Müller (*Rhetoric of Reaction*, 14).

47. Likewise, Ophuls suggests that the explanation for the "tragedy of Enlightenment politics" is to be found in its tendency to "devour the capital upon which civilization is founded" (*Requiem for Modern Politics*, 266). The "worthy aspiration" of the Enlightenment to liberate humanity from arbitrary power was "pursued with hubris and without balance or wisdom, producing . . . perverse and self-destructive consequences" (pp. 279-80). See also his use of Burke to explain how "Hobbesian politics creates what it fears" (p. 231).

48. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 357.

49. *Ibid.*, 358.

50. Ophuls sometimes explains the perverse results of the Enlightenment project by arguing that it failed to alter prevailing dispositions. Thus, he suggests that "the Enlightenment's purported cure for the ills of civilization is only a more virulent form of the disease" (*Requiem for Modern Politics*, 174), which "only aggravated" the "essential psychopathology" of civilization (p. 267).

51. For the discussion of the virtues of Aristotelian pluralism, see Lang, *Act and Idea*, 199.

52. For something approximating this argument, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946), which concludes by suggesting that the triumph of fascism might best be understood as a result of the failure of enlightened rationality to have adequately understood how to eradicate myth. In the face of this failure, Cassirer calls for further enlightenment.

53. Lang, *Act and Idea*, 189.

54. *Ibid.*, 186.

55. *Ibid.*, 194-95.

56. *Ibid.*, 191.

57. For discussions of Kant's ethics that are sensitive to the anthropological and historical dimensions of his thought, see Allen W. Wood, "Unsociable Sociability: The Anthropological Basis of Kantian Ethics," *Philosophical Topics* 19 (1991): 325-51, and G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character: The "Critical" Link of Morality, Anthropology, and Reflective Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

58. Lang, *Act and Idea*, 189.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 196.

61. Ibid., 197-98.

62. Hirschman, *Rhetoric of Reaction*, 149-50.

63. Ibid., 162-63.

64. The task of explaining how the Enlightenment was to be saved from itself was to be the task of the projected sequel to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a book tentatively titled *The Rescue of Enlightenment*. For a discussion, see my "Language, Mythology, and Enlightenment: Historical Notes on Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *Social Research* 65 (1998): 807-38.

65. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xiii.

66. Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 48. For a discussion, see James Schmidt and Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault-Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 283-314.

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