

**“RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT”**  
**– PERIPHERAL, SUBSTANTIAL, OR THE MAIN FACE**  
**OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC ENLIGHTENMENT (1650–1850)**

– Jonathan Israel –

**Abstract.** “Radical Enlightenment” and “moderate Enlightenment” are general categories which, it has become evident in recent decades, are unavoidable and essential for any valid discussion of the Enlightenment broadly conceived (1650–1850) and of the revolutionary era (1775–1848). Any discussion of the Enlightenment or revolutions that does not revolve around these general categories, first introduced in Germany in the 1920s and taken up in the United States since the 1970s, cannot have any validity or depth either historically or philosophically. “Radical Enlightenment” was neither peripheral to the Enlightenment as a whole, nor dominant, but rather the “other side of the coin” an inherent and absolute opposite, always present and always basic to the Enlightenment as a whole. Several different constructions of “Radical Enlightenment” have been proposed by the main innovators on the topic – Leo Strauss, Henry May, Günter Mühlhpfordt, Margaret Jacob, Gianni Paganini, Martin Mulrow, and Jonathan Israel – but, it is argued here, the most essential element in the definition is the coupling, or linkage, of philosophical rejection of religious authority (and secularism – the elimination of theology from law, institutions, education and public affairs) with theoretical advocacy of democracy and basic human rights.

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, Radical Enlightenment, moderate Enlightenment, democracy, aristocracy, universal education, equality, emancipation, republicanism, mixed government, poverty, economic oppression, crypto-radicalism, positivism, American revolution, French revolution, atheism, early socialism, pantheism.

If we begin from the post-revolutionary perspective of the 1790s and the first half of the nineteenth century, it becomes immediately clear to the philosopher, no less than the historian, political scientist and social scientist, why dividing the Western, trans-Atlantic Enlightenment into two distinct, incompatible and in some respects opposed general categories is not just useful or applicable but unavoidable and essential.

It is often not realized, even by professional historians and philosophers, that ideologically the legacy of the American Revolution was scarcely less deeply divisive, pitting “moderates” against “radicals,” than the French. Viewed from the

perspective of social history, numerous scholars now accept, following Gary Nash and others, that the American Revolution was a movement led by an elite of landowners and top merchants projecting themselves as "gentlemen" and aristocrats whose watchwords were "freedom," "security" and "order;" but that it was a revolutionary impulse which clashed at certain points with another tendency welling up from lower down in society, and reflecting the interests and outlook of small tenant farmers and others from the lower strata who put greater emphasis on "equality" and equity. In this respect, the American Revolution was not necessarily particularly novel, reflecting a tension, and a structural duality, perceptible at any rate sporadically also in earlier major upheavals such as the Dutch Revolt and the English Revolution of the 1640s.<sup>1</sup> However, the American Revolution was fundamentally novel in using divergent forms of Enlightenment philosophy to give expression to this social duality and tension.

Conservative American enlighteners, of whom John Adams was the most persistent and perhaps most sophisticated in expounding his views, considered their Revolution strictly political and a process which ended with victory in the war against the British crown, in 1783. Adams, Hamilton, Jay, Gouverneur Morris, John Dickinson and others defended the social status quo, especially the principle of informal aristocracy, resisted the democratic tendency, often eulogized Locke and Montesquieu and detested the democratic rhetoric of the French Revolution. Against this, their opponents contended that the American Revolution had not secured all its objectives and hence had not ended in 1783. As one contemporary commentator put it: "The American War is over, but this is far from the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed."<sup>2</sup> The radical democrats not only produced a long list of projected reforms but fiercely attacked the "enlightened" ideological underpinning of the conservatism they challenged. "It is not to be presumed," contended Elihu Palmer, a veteran disciple of Paine, Volney and Price blinded during the Philadelphia Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793, an outspoken opponent of the "aristocrats" as well as of the preachers, and founder of the Deistical Society of New York, in 1796-1797, "that in any country man has arrived at perfection in political science." He did not question that the "American [federal and state] constitutions are, undoubtedly, more perfect than any others that ever were formed" and that very positive practical "effects" had resulted from the war. "But will any one dare to say," he demanded of his New York audience, in 1797, "that there is no room for

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<sup>1</sup> Nash [2005] pp. 453-455; Davidson [2012] p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Rush quoted in Nash [2005] p. 453.

improvement?" He urged his audience to remember "what blind attachment was bestowed for many ages upon the British government" and how defective, monarchical and aristocratic the British constitution of the eighteenth century actually was in reality: "and shall Americans at this time exhibit similar imbecility and prejudice, by proclaiming the impossibility of improvement in the primary arrangements of our political institutions?"<sup>3</sup>

During the early and mid-nineteenth century, a sense of the Revolution being incomplete was common in radical circles in both America and Europe. The French Revolution, contended the philosopher Auguste Comte, in his report on the general significance and philosophical implications of the 1848 Revolution in France, delivered to the Paris Société Positiviste, in August 1848, dwarfed in significance and universal impact every other modern phenomenon. But when considered as a transformation in general political culture that had begun with what he called the "explosion decisive" of 1789, it had not ended with Napoleon's dictatorship or the Restoration in 1815 but rather continued as an ongoing phenomenon and had by no means yet reached its conclusion in 1848. The French Revolution began in 1789 on a political level. But beneath what he called "l'ordre politique," the revolutionary process had commenced much earlier. For the fundamental transformation in ideas which had prepared the way and caused the "explosion decisive," the overturning of *ancien régime* thought, or what he called the "mutation opérée dans les intelligences," had occurred over many decades prior to 1789 and, in France at least, had reached an advanced stage by then.<sup>4</sup> Ideologically, this uninterrupted French Revolution extending from the later seventeenth century to 1848 had, according to Comte who here, as in so much else, was profoundly inspired by Condorcet in particular,<sup>5</sup> divided French culture into two implacably antagonistic camps - a revolutionary segment preponderant in Paris fighting for democracy and equality and a conservative segment, preponderant in the provinces, defending monarchy, aristocracy, and religious authority.

Why was this ideological duality and antagonism, common to Europe and America, so overridingly important for the forming of modernity? And why was this fundamentally different from earlier upheavals in politics and society in France and elsewhere? Because, explained Comte, quite correctly, its real nature was such that the revolutionary experience of the late eighteenth century

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<sup>3</sup> Palmer [1797] pp. 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Comte [1848] pp. 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Muglioni [1995] pp. 99-100.

inevitably divided whole societies, and would eventually irreversibly divide all societies into warring halves motivated by conflicting visions of society and institutions, creating a situation which could only be resolved, in his opinion by changing society's entire general and intellectual culture: "la seule solution definitive est la reorganization des opinions et des moeurs."<sup>6</sup> The Revolution could only be ended by finally resolving the conflict of ideas which meant reforming ideas from top to bottom including those of the presently largely illiterate peasantry and working population, changing society's whole educational structure, and finally eliminating what he termed the "système théologique" identified by him as the root of all modern post-1789 conservatism, that is the binding together of forms of despotism, and the denial of equality and democracy, with religion, theology and all philosophical systems not rooted in observational science. A further essential precondition that had to be met if the definitive conclusion to the Revolution was to ensue, according to Comte, was a vast and ambitious reallocation of resources from the military and the churches to be re-assigned by the modern state to raise the economic level of the poor, provide work for the unemployed, and eliminate pauperism, deprivation, crime and forced prostitution.

By the 1790s, the post-revolutionary antagonism between those in the United States who insisted the Revolution had ended in 1783 and aspired to prevent the onset of democracy (and other fundamental social and political reforms), the faction gathered around Washington, Hamilton and John Adams, the so-called Federalist party, and the more democratic and republican faction headed by Jefferson and Madison, had become furious and extremely bitter. Although very few were equipped to place America's ideological strife in its broader trans-Atlantic cultural and philosophical context, everyone could (then) see that the split had certain broad ideological implications. One bloc was democratic, warmly supported the French Revolution, rejected the informal aristocracy that dominated especially the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Virginia, and the rest of the south sharply criticized Montesquieu and the "British model," and was increasingly opposed by most preachers. The presiding bloc dominating the Federal government at the time was vehemently opposed to the democratic and social reforming ambitions of the French Revolution, deeply committed to upholding informal aristocracy, adamantly pro-British in the sense of admiring the post-1688 British Constitution, mixed government and British thinkers' valuing experience (and empiricism) above abstract principle. They were

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<sup>6</sup> Comte [1848] p. 10.

also closely allied to the main churches, and routinely adopted Montesquieu who was by far the most widely read and debated political philosopher in North America during the era of the American Revolution, as their chief enlightened spokesman.<sup>7</sup> Federalists supported the "Alien and Sedition Acts," passed by Congress and signed into law by President John Adams in 1798, giving government special powers to eliminate politically subversive criticism from the press and public meetings; Jeffersonians, by contrast, loudly condemned the "Alien and Sedition Acts" which forced the *philosophe*, Volney, and Poland's great revolutionary leader, Kosciuszko, to leave the United States and put several radical intellectuals and newspaper editors in prison, labeling these enactments an outrageous infringement of basic freedoms.<sup>8</sup>

The split proved irresolvable. Many Americans in 1800 were sufficiently radical to want to see the influence of the eastern seaboard's aristocratic elite diminished, black slavery abolished, poor blacks helped to integrate into society, universal education introduced, and the state and Federal constitutions reformed so as to widen the suffrage to include poor male whites at least. Many wanted also to end property qualifications for office-holding and to eliminate religious tests for holding office as well as abolish the stringent "blasphemy laws." However, while the best-read and most committed to Enlightenment principles, most notably Franklin, Jefferson and Madison, were also strongly committed to reducing the power of the pulpit, considering this indispensable to achieving a stable democratic republic, most American enlighteners and reformers, including Jefferson, having repeatedly had their fingers severely burned by public outcries against "infidelity," took considerable care to avoid appearing publicly to be systematically attacking religious authority and the essentials of Christian doctrine which, however, all these democratic leaders assiduously did privately. Only a tiny minority of American enlighteners in the years around 1800 followed Tom Paine, Joel Barlow and Elihu Palmer in struggling, at great personal cost and with their public reputations torn to shreds, in broadly and publicly attacking Christian theology and religious authority as such. Although they were widely read and discussed,<sup>9</sup> these figures had to suffer general reprobation and condemnation. These were the fully committed, publicly proclaimed exponents of "Radical Enlightenment."

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<sup>7</sup> For a quantitative demonstration of Montesquieu's ubiquity and exceptional status (far beyond that of Locke) as the principal political philosopher of the American Revolution, see Lutz [1984] pp. 189-197.

<sup>8</sup> May [1976] pp. 275, 333.

<sup>9</sup> Wood [2009] p. 579.

Paine, Barlow, Palmer, Callender, Fellows, Freneau, Coram, Thomas Cooper and those like them aimed at generalizing the American reforming effort while simultaneously building an exemplar for every people and every country.<sup>10</sup> Like Paine and Barlow, Palmer and Freneau were unambiguous in promoting a philosophy at once irreligious and politically revolutionary, simultaneously American and French. Their undeviating aim was to propagate, as Palmer expressed it, "that mild and peaceful philosophy, whose object is the discovery of truth, and whose first wish is to emancipate the world from the double despotism of church and state." For Palmer, Freneau, Cooper and Callender, no less than Paine and Barlow, it was axiomatic that mankind languished under a double despotism of priestcraft and "king-craft," and that this double despotism, or at least the threat of it, had by no means been wholly removed from the United States. "The philosophers, the patriots, the philanthropist of all countries," as Palmer understood the process, "are combining the wishes of their hearts and the efforts of their minds to meliorate the condition of the human race; and, so they behold, in the progressive movement of intellectual power, the certain ruin, the inevitable destruction of those pernicious systems of error and superstition, of civil and religious despotism which have so long desolated the world and degraded the character of man."<sup>11</sup>

Attacking political and religious despotism, promoting democracy and eroding religious authority then, were not just closely but inseparably and organically linked for American no less than European radical enlighteners. This was because the essence of their project was to teach that the "grand object of all civil and religious tyrants," as Palmer expressed it, "the privileged impostors of the world, has been to suppress all the elevated operations of the mind, to kill the energy of thought, and through this channel to subjugate the whole earth for their special emolument. When men are kept in a total ignorance of their rights by those whom they are taught to revere as beings of a higher order, it is not to be expected that they will be capable of that activity by which alone their privileges are to be regained. Slavery and fear have rendered them torpid and senseless, without acquiring knowledge sufficient to exercise a holy indignation against their oppressors."<sup>12</sup> Palmer again and again echoes d' Holbach's claim that men are unaware of their rights and the true nature of society essentially because of their "ignorance;" so that men's ignorance, the overriding ill in human society, is

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<sup>10</sup> Jacoby [2004] p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Palmer [1797] p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pp. 4-5.

deliberately perpetuated by those who mislead the majority for their own gain, the "despots" deceiving mankind being always and typically an alliance of kings and priests. Nearly all human societies have been continuously steeped in violence, war and oppression unnecessarily, insists d' Holbach, due to men deliberately being kept ignorant, unaware of enlightened principles, and consequently exploited. The prevailing structures of power and authority in the world rest on the laws of politics not being generally understood.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the early socialists of the 1830s and 1840s who believed casting off the chains of economic oppression and drudgery imposed by capitalists would suffice to liberate the oppressed underclass, for radical enlighteners, even though, for them too, far-reaching economic reform was indispensable, it was never the central or most urgent issue. For radical enlighteners, there is no path to human liberation from oppression except through conquering ignorance and superstition by means of their anti-theological, one-substance philosophy, philosophy which for the blind Palmer, no less than Diderot, d' Holbach, Helvétius and Condorcet earlier, was simultaneously a politically and socially comprehensive reform programme and a reform of all philosophy aimed at eliminating religious authority. This, for radical enlighteners, was the central, overriding law of history: the more enlightened a society is, the less it is corrupt, oppressive and despotic. "Plus le despotisme s'appesantit sur les hommes, moins il veut qu'on les éclaire."<sup>14</sup>

The new philosophy, rooted in naturalism and materialism was, in the eyes of the radical enlighteners, a universal liberating force that had already "destroyed innumerable errors," advanced science and technology, repulsed theological ire and arrogance, and devised "those moral and political systems, which have softened the savage and ferocious heart of man, and raised the ignorant slave from the dust, into the elevated character of an enlightened citizen."<sup>15</sup> These men were eminently clear about their objectives and criteria and knew exactly who their leading and most effective contemporary publicists were. Palmer admired Paine, "probably the most useful man who ever existed on the face of the earth,"<sup>16</sup> above all the others, but was full of praise for Condorcet, Volney, Helvétius, d'Holbach, Godwin, Price and Bentham too.

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<sup>13</sup> d' Holbach [1773] pp. 10-18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 187.

<sup>15</sup> Palmer [1801] p. 159; Keane [1995] pp. 497-500; Walters [2011] p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> Foner [1976] p. 256.

For radical enlighteners, in contrast to the early socialists, Enlightenment in the sense of changing how the masses think, and not overthrowing the economic system was (and is) the key to human liberation generally; and, for them, the trans-Atlantic revolutionary impulse proclaiming the oneness of the American Revolution with the authentic French Revolution – i.e. not the Jacobin Revolution of Robespierre and the Montagne but that of Condorcet, the Brissotins and the Idéologues – was the spearhead of the transforming, totalizing Enlightenment they advocated. Consequently, they rightly suspected an intrinsic link between the Federalists' antipathy to the French Revolution and this group's anti-democratic stance in American politics and social thought. It was no "uncharitable gesture," insisted Palmer in his New York oration of 1797, "to suppose that those who indulge such violent resentments against the French nation, on account of the EXCESSES of the Revolution, are influenced by other sentiments than those that are purely humane and benevolent; and that some secret attachment to the British system of government has united itself with their political opinions." It was undeniable, he believed, that in the United States of 1797 those who "feel the strongest attachment to the French Revolution are the most decidedly opposed to those measures of our own government resembling the British scheme of policy; while, on the other hand, those who advocate those measures are not observed to speak with much affection relative to the true interests of France."<sup>17</sup>

No doubt both sides in the ferocious American political arena of the 1790s claimed to represent the authentic spirit and true tradition of the American Revolution. But since the Radical Enlightenment tendency represented by voices like those of Paine, Barlow, Palmer, Cooper, Callender, Coram, Fellows and Freneau was later stifled for the most part, it is essential to take note of why these men considered Washington and the Federalists to have deserted the true principles of the American Revolution. To these writers and intellectuals it was an astonishing outrage that the presiding faction in American politics should have become the tacit allies of the despots of the Old World. "Whence this political apostasy," demanded Palmer, "this dereliction of good principles in our own country?"<sup>18</sup> In fighting the pro-British conservative reaction, they spared no effort to keep these "good principles" alive. Philosophical truth was universal for all men in their eyes, and so equally was political truth. The overriding point in Diderot's, d' Holbach's and Helvétius' political thought was that a means must be found to prevent elites and vested interests preying on the majority. This

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<sup>17</sup> Palmer [1797] p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

remained the backbone of the Radical Enlightenment political stance and the spur to its democratic tendency. As Freneau expressed it in his revolutionary verse: "How can we call those systems just Which bid the few, the proud, the first Possess all earthly good; While millions robbed of all that's dear In silence shed the ceaseless tear, And leeches suck their blood."<sup>19</sup>

"The primary and fundamental objects of all civil and political institutions," as Palmer expressed it, "are the preservation of personal and individual existence - the establishment of liberty on its true basis, the principles of equality, and the security of the fruits of man's industry, and of his pursuit of happiness in every possible way, not inconsistent with the welfare of any member of the community - and also the free exercise of the mental faculties in the discovery, disclosure and propagation of important truths. These objects being essentially important in every associated body of men, the more perfectly a civil constitution secures and establishes them, the nearer it approaches the true point of political truth and perfection."<sup>20</sup>

This last point neatly illustrates what became a defining political characteristic of the Radical Enlightenment during the revolutionary era - its systemic hostility to Montesquieu as the political philosopher who most comprehensively offered relativism, different types of government with varying legal systems, and most extensively eulogized the British model, using it to defend aristocracy. In the United States and the Caribbean, Montesquieu's political thought was frequently taken up to defend informal aristocracy, and in the latter case and the American south even black slavery. The classic expression of the disapproving anti-Montesquieu tendency in the late Enlightenment was the university thesis, afterwards translated into French, submitted at Uppsala, in 1787, by the later prominent Swedish poet and Spinozist, Thomas Thorild (1759-1808). According to this internationally neglected but outstanding and very vocal democratic republican, Montesquieu was always "great and ingenious" but "rarely interesting or true." He was especially blameworthy for offering humanity three different kinds of political system - the despotic, aristocratic and the republican - when he should have insisted on only one, namely the democratic republican.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Walters [1992] p. 288; Wood [2009] p. 356.

<sup>20</sup> Palmer [1797] p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Le Conservateur des Principes des Républicains* ii, no. 7 (Paris, 20 Messidor Year II), pp. 3-8; Israel [2014b] pp. 335-336, 698.

Only one political system, namely democratic republicanism authentically geared to the well-being of the majority, can be optimal for humans, contended the radical enlighteners, and although pre-existing legal systems, climate and specific conditions are always relevant to political outcomes, only one political system can be universally valid from a genuinely "philosophic" perspective, which for Thorild, as with radical enlighteners generally, was the only perspective that counts. Beautifully appropriate in general, as well as in reference to the American and French revolutions, were Thorild's words taken from a pamphlet of 1794, after he had publicly repudiated Robespierre and the Montagne, which today stand engraved in golden letters above the entrance to the Grand Auditorium of Uppsala University: "Tänka fritt är stort men tänka rätt är store" [To think freely is great but to think rightly is greater]. No important European, British or American intellectual of the revolutionary era endorsed or praised, or even tepidly condoned Robespierre and his regime; and while Thorild, waiting until the end of 1793, was among the last major radical enlighteners to condemn Robespierre publicly, when he did eventually pronounce publicly against him, he by no means minced his words, calling Robespierre an "all-consuming crocodile."<sup>22</sup>

Thorild was a lone voice in the Swedish context in the sense that he openly attacked monarchy, aristocracy and ecclesiastical authority, doing so in a more comprehensive and sweeping manner than anyone else. But we know that the Swedish government was worried by local signs of sympathy for the French republicans and that Thorild had his supporters in Stockholm. If Paine was utterly alone in the United States in publicly attacking George Washington's reputation, accusing him of hypocrisy and betrayal, behind him followed a whole radical phalanx hinting rather than directly stating that America's first president was an "apostate" from "true principles" who had betrayed the democratic cause. And there was undoubtedly some logic to this charge. Although entirely forgotten today when Washington towers in the American mind as an unchallenged symbol of the American Revolution and the roots of modern democracy, in the early and mid-nineteenth century he was more often, and more convincingly, styled a conservative statesman striving to resist fundamental reform and democracy, and stem the tide of the French Revolution. The renowned conservative French minister and historian, Guizot, for example, in his passionate denunciation of democracy as the ruin of modern France and modern society, published in 1849, only a few months after Comte's totally different assessment of democracy's significance for modernity, warmly eulogized America's first president precisely

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<sup>22</sup> Israel [2014b] p. 698.

because, without using the despotic and forceful methods of Napoleon, and while strictly adhering to the United States Constitution and to legality, Washington had consistently and effectively defended informal aristocracy, always preferring "gentlemen" for military command and high office to ordinary folk, and because he headed what the fearful Guizot considered a heroic American political offensive to halt the progress of democracy, equality and full-fledged republicanism in America.<sup>23</sup>

I have particularly stressed here the inseparability and tight conjunction of the dual offensives of the radical enlighteners against political and religious "despotism," the close linkage of the philosophical onslaught on theology and their promotion of democracy, a feature too obvious and ubiquitous in Paine, Palmer, Barlow, Cooper, Price, Priestley, Freneau, Godwin and Bentham, no less than in Diderot, d' Holbach, Helvétius, Mirabeau, Condorcet, Thorild and Volney, to be challenged, for several reasons. Firstly, it is necessary here to repeat, as I have argued many times, that this dual character is pervasive in all radical texts, part of any meaningful definition of "Radical Enlightenment" as a general category, part of the essence of the Radical Enlightenment not just in its post-1775 stages but throughout, from the 1650s onwards, and that we should set aside all those interpretations and constructions of "Radical Enlightenment" that fail to bring out this dual character. Here I am partially in agreement with Margaret Jacob but disagree with Martin Mulso who, citing Reimarus as an example, thinks it sufficiently defines *Radikalaufklärung* that a writer wholly rejects traditional theology and established religious authority, and philosophical systems linked to theological premises, irrespective of his or her political stance.<sup>24</sup> I do not think such an approach really helps clarify the general category "Radical Enlightenment," or catches its essential spirit, and would level a similar objection to the first major thinker to develop the concept in twentieth-century philosophical debate, Leo Strauss,<sup>25</sup> who uses this term from the late 1920s onwards, doing so first in his study of Spinoza's Bible criticism.<sup>26</sup> Strauss defines "Radical Enlightenment" *Radikale Aufklärung*, as he termed it, and which he regarded as the true core of the Enlightenment as a whole, essentially as "atheism," although he added that *Radikale Aufklärung* as he defines it, was characterized also by a particular naturalistic conception of philosophy, knowledge and science. For

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<sup>23</sup> Guizot [1849] pp. 27–29, 37–39.

<sup>24</sup> See Israel and Mulso [2014] pp. 7–19; Mulso [2014]; and Israel [2014c].

<sup>25</sup> See the forthcoming paper of the Danish scholar Frederik Stjernfelt; here: Stjernfelt [2013].

<sup>26</sup> Strauss [1967] p. 35; see also Smith [2003] p. 191.

Strauss, underlying Spinoza's philosophy and the *radikale Aufklärung* generally is the belief their standpoint was more objectively true and subject to scholarly verification, by reason and scientific observation, than that of Spinoza's innumerable philosophical and theological opponents. Strauss was undoubtedly aware that eliminating all religious authority must have far-reaching political implications but paid little or no attention to this aspect. Meanwhile, the first scholar to develop the "Radical Enlightenment" concept in English, Henry F. May, who made important contributions to developing this topic (closely followed by Donald H. Meyer<sup>27</sup>), while not exactly guilty of the opposite fault, stressing the profound nature of the political divide in American Enlightenment literature while failing to link this to the attack on religious authority, in my view did not sufficiently explain and emphasize this double character, this defining duality and linkage.

A second reason for insisting on the centrality of this linkage here is that the claim that there is no recurring and essential bond between democratic thought and subverting religious authority in the Enlightenment is one of the few general, concrete theses figuring in the huge juggernaut of criticism that has poured out in recent years attacking the thesis that Radical Enlightenment was the only major cause of the democratic republican tendency in the French Revolution and of that Revolution's major legislative enactments. Although very impressive in terms of quantity,<sup>28</sup> this now huge body of criticism leaves nearly all the main theses of the interpretation unchallenged, focusing instead on often largely irrelevant marginalia and issues which are beside the point. The assertion that there is no necessary connection between political and religious radicalism, is one of the critical juggernaut's very few attempts at a concrete basic objection, and one which if correct would indeed undermine the whole Radical Enlightenment construct as it has been developed since the mid-1990s. But this objection, if concrete, comprehensive and fundamental is also very weak. Whether we look to America or Europe, the early Enlightenment or the later Enlightenment, this contention rests on no evidence, and is roundly contradicted by a vast amount of evidence. The two forms of subversion go hand in hand continually both as a matter of historical fact, as see with Paine, Palmer and Thorild, and equally as a matter of philosophical argument revolving round the claim that kings and priests were despotic allies that aided each other, and that miracles, superstition and ignorance,

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<sup>27</sup> Meyer [1976] pp. xiv-xxvi.

<sup>28</sup> Thus far the main contributors to this massively negative critical juggernaut are Lilti, La Vopa, Verbeek, Moyn, Jacob, Stuurman, Chisick, Casini, Bell, De Dijn, McMahan, Van Kley, Wright, Baker, Armenteros, Goldenbaum and Edelstein.

while chiefly exploited and preserved by priestcraft, were at the same time the essential basis of all political despotism. The only cogent conclusion is that the very widely repeated contention that there is no essential connection, though vigorously insisted on (often aggressively and scornfully), is altogether wrong and doubly lacking, historically and philosophically, in intellectual force.

A third reason for underlining the centrality of the ties between religious authority and political despotism in Radical Enlightenment thought here is to dispel another mistaken assumption the reader might easily derive from the fact that very few Americans followed Paine, Cooper, Barlow, Freneau and Palmer in openly attacking religious authority. It might be tempting to infer that therefore the Radical Enlightenment was essentially a fringe phenomenon marginal to the Enlightenment as a whole. But this would be just as gross a mistake as supposing that the critics are right to maintain that there is no necessary linkage between democratic republicanism and one-substance philosophy. For the thesis that the radical tendency was marginal relies on making no allowance for the masking and concealment that was a defining, quintessential feature of the Radical Enlightenment at all stages. Here I am strongly in agreement with Martin Mulrow. From its very outset in the Dutch context, in the 1650s, Van den Enden, Koerbagh, Meyer, and Spinoza felt obliged to camouflage or veil some strands of their criticism of contemporary society, politics and especially religion. In Spinoza's case he did so by publishing his *Tractatus-Theologico Politicus* (1670) anonymously and refusing to permit its appearance in the Dutch language during his life-time, as well as – if we follow Strauss at least partially – veiling or camouflaging some of his deeply irreligious concepts with seemingly less confrontational ideas and expressions. Pierre Bayle, of course, while seeking to extend toleration and secularize politics, indubitably practiced this art to a much greater extent.<sup>29</sup> Antoine Lilti's critique, perhaps the most systematic of the whole juggernaut, is mistaken, I have argued, in all its main points; but his confusion with respect to Bayle's supposed fideism and skepticism is particularly blatant.<sup>30</sup>

The Radical Enlightenment from 1650 to 1850 was always in part, and in varying degrees – albeit more so earlier than later – a concealed stream of thought, of what in German is termed *Kryptoradikalität*, so that the radical tendency's exponents and adherents were invariably more numerous and widespread than the evidence of open defiance of religious authority in the manner of Paine, Barlow or Palmer would indicate. After his death, in 1781, Lessing was accused,

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<sup>29</sup> Paganini [2007] pp. 88–89; Mori [1999] pp. 181–271; McKenna [2004] pp. 321–347.

<sup>30</sup> See Lilti [2009] pp. 171–206; and Israel [2011a] pp. 173–225, here especially pp. 209–212.

by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), not entirely without justification, of having concealed his innermost thoughts and ideas from the public, of masking his Spinozism. In Germany, pivoting on Erfurt, Halle and Leipzig, and concealing its activities from the princes, arose a politically active crypto-radical network in the 1780s, an underground secret society called the “Deutsche Union” directed by Karl Friedrich Bahrdt (1740–1792).<sup>31</sup> But there are many more examples to be drawn from the later Enlightenment era indicating the necessity of organizing underground intellectual networks and veiling fundamental ideas. Most of what Bentham wrote on sexual matters “where he carried permissiveness and libertarianism to a considerable pitch,” it has been pointed out, remained unpublished until the 1930s.<sup>32</sup> So repressive and reactionary was the mood in Britain in the late eighteenth century and during the early nineteenth, that Bentham, while never revealing his views on sexual freedom, waited four decades after first emerging as a public reformer and aligning himself with the Enlightenment of Helvétius and Beccaria (and on religious matters with Hume and Voltaire) before publicly expressing his radical rejection of Christian belief and theology.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of the United States, we know for certain that many, and in the cases of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, much more prominent Americans than Paine, Barlow, Freneau, Cooper, Fellows or Palmer, privately endorsed and embraced, often with real passion, the positions the latter, rather exceptionally, were courageous enough to proclaim openly.<sup>34</sup> Jefferson was very friendly and intellectually proximate to the materialist and atheist Constantin François Chasseboeuf, comte de Volney (1757–1820), whilst the latter was in America and anonymously translated a large part of his major radical work *Les Ruines* (1791), a book, by the way, which is yet another telling instance of the recurring tight philosophical linkage of the attacks on political despotism and religious authority in radical thought;<sup>35</sup> Jefferson’s private correspondence can leave no serious doubt that he thought much like Volney, Condorcet, Paine and Barlow on God, religion, theology and the clergy, as indeed did Franklin earlier.

However, it is not just the burgeoning number of major and minor figures who fit into the general category “Radical Enlightenment” that forbids classifying

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<sup>31</sup> Mühlpfordt [2009] in: Mühlpfordt and Weiss [2009] pp. 297–232.

<sup>32</sup> Burns [1984] pp. 4–14, here p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, pp. 5–6.

<sup>34</sup> Stephens [2014] pp. 144–150.

<sup>35</sup> Peterson [1970] pp. 576, 580, 604, 714; Buel [2011] pp. 259–260.

this dimension of the Enlightenment as peripheral or marginal to the Enlightenment as a whole but also, and equally important, the centrality of the Radical Enlightenment defined as a stance comprehensively assailing political and religious "despotism" simultaneously to be found in the major debates and quarrels of the Enlightenment. This may be particularly obvious for the period after 1789 but is no less true for the period prior to the French Revolution. The last phase of Voltaire's career, from the late 1760s down to his death in 1778, was overshadowed by a split among the *philosophes*, provoked in particular by d'Holbach's scathing attack on religion and the existing social and political order, as well as traditional philosophy and science, in his *Système de la nature* (1770), a work published in Amsterdam but in large quantity and numerous re-editions and very widely distributed in France. Voltaire joked rather sourly (because he won less support for his conservative opposition to d' Holbach's stance than he hoped) that this work divided opinion in France as distinctly and equally as any "minuet at Versailles."

As it became clear during the course of the 1750s that the emerging *Encyclopédie* was a cleverly disguised and camouflaged subversive machine in many of its articles, a number of moderate enlighteners, including Charles Bonnet and Albrecht von Haller, abandoned their earlier enthusiasm and rallied behind the French crown in its decision to ban the whole enterprise.<sup>36</sup> Equally, at an earlier stage, the question of whether or not Bayle's philosophy amounted to atheism, secularism and the complete separation of morality and social policy from theological tenets, and whether therefore his proclaimed fideism was merely a philosophical smokescreen, became the central issue in the ongoing battle between him and Jean le Clerc and the other *rationaux*, the latter representing a major strand of the 'religious Enlightenment' during the opening years of the eighteenth century. The same antagonistic dichotomy figures centrally in Leibniz's *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (1710), essentially a reply to Spinoza and Bayle that prefigured many of the later quarrels within the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.<sup>37</sup> All of this of course drives a massive hole right through the middle of the critical juggernaut; but, of course, our amiable critics, safe in numbers, feel little need even to broach any of these central controversies.

This entire recurring pattern of controversy, a partly underground, dual assault on the monarchical-aristocratic social system and religious belief together,

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<sup>36</sup> Israel [2011b] pp. 56–92; see also Le Ru [2007].

<sup>37</sup> See Israel [2014a].

was so pivotal to the general history of the Enlightenment as a whole as to be conclusive evidence for the centrality of the split between moderate and Radical Enlightenment. But there is more. In addition, we must remember that most French Catholic so-called *anti-philosophes* of the eighteenth century, including Bergier, Nonnotte and Lamourette, were not at all participants in the Counter-Enlightenment as McMahon incorrectly presented them, but rather, as Andrew Curran correctly emphasized, an integral part of the "moderate Enlightenment." The basic category mistake resulting from McMahon's wrong classification of the liberal Catholic apologists as "Counter-Enlightenment," urgently needs correcting, for these writers represent a major strand of the European Enlightenment. In their campaign against the radicals, moreover, attacking materialism and their adversaries' rejection of religious authority did not necessarily always go hand in hand with political conservatism. Philosophically, these men rejected determinism and materialism espousing the "truth above reason" doctrine of Locke, Le Clerc, and Voltaire; but on the political front such men were not necessarily anti-democrats or "moderates" although most of them were. The Abbé Claude Fauchet (1744–1793) who became the "constitutional" bishop of Calvados during the Revolution was in this respect, like Lamourette and the Abbé Henri Grégoire, a remarkable exception, a courageous hybrid, who passionately espoused the social and political goals of the democratic Revolution (albeit abominating Marat and Robespierre, like all the radicals), while simultaneously rejecting the atheism and irreligion of Condorcet, Brissot, Cloots, Pétion, Bonneville, Carra, Desmoulin and other "enlightened" republicans.<sup>38</sup> Such a stance was possible but unusual and difficult to adhere to: all three became hopelessly isolated within the Revolution.

Radical Enlightenment was always intrinsic and central to the Enlightenment at every stage of its evolution from 1650 down to Comte's Positivist prognostications around 1850. Leo Strauss went so far as to regard the *Radikale Aufklärung* as the veritable Enlightenment, casting Moses Mendelssohn and other exemplary "moderates" as feeble compromisers unwittingly doing more to weaken, than genuinely buttress, their attempted reconciliation of Enlightenment thought with tradition and religion. But this is going too far. For if the Enlightenment always revolves around the split between reason alone and reason in balance with "above reason," that is religious authority, equally obviously the conservative Enlightenment was always a powerful, and often a prevailing counterforce. This is clear not least from the profound split down the

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<sup>38</sup> For the error, see McMahon [2001]; for the corrective, Curran [2012] pp. 9–11, 152, 161, 163–164.

middle of the entire Enlightenment provoked by the French Revolution – among the ranks of America’s enlighteners no less than in Europe. The Radical Enlightenment never at any stage dominated the entire Enlightenment arena. If in the early stages, in Holland, France and England prior to 1750, the radical tendency was sometimes conspicuous but mostly concealed or partly concealed, the moderate Enlightenment remained a formidable and powerful tendency within the French Revolution as we see from the revolutionary careers of the anglophile liberal monarchists Mounier, Malouet, and Barnave. With Napoleon’s dictatorship and his Concordat with the Papacy, moderate Enlightenment was again the predominant reforming mode throughout Europe down to 1815 and in some respects, such as the partial freedom of the press that survived in France between 1815 and 1822, even longer. Both radical and moderate enlighteners figured prominently on both sides of the great Spanish political struggle from Napoleon’s invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1807 down to the crushing of the constitutionalists by Louis XVIII’s army in 1823. Both on the side of the *Josefinos* and *afancesados* supporting the French, and the Patriots fighting the French in alliance with Britain, one found radicals who were republicans, democrats and enemies of the Church; but most remained in varying degrees supporters of monarchy, aristocracy, traditional philosophy and ecclesiastical power.

Mostly, down to the mid nineteenth century, the moderate Enlightenment, defined by its attempts, following Locke, to balance “reason” with religious authority, and underwrite the existing social and political order, even if demanding some reforms, was overwhelmingly the dominant mode of the Enlightenment – at any rate in the public sphere. The proviso is important because reason was not necessarily balanced by tradition and religious authority in the mind of the *philosophe* himself as we see in the cases of such notorious religious skeptics as Voltaire, Frederick the Great and David Hume. Nevertheless, unlike the radicals, these enlighteners still insisted on the necessity of religious authority and ecclesiastical guidance if not for themselves then certainly for the great mass of the population. Thus, the defining differentiation between radical and moderate Enlightenment in terms of reason alone, or reason qualified by truths and mysteries “above reason” accessible only to theology, became integrally linked to a further quarrel among enlighteners about whether all of society needed to become enlightened as radical enlighteners insisted, or only society’s elites. Since the moderates broadly upheld the existing political and social order and were not attempting to transform society comprehensively, they saw no compelling need for everyone, or indeed anyone beyond the elite, to become enlightened. Voltaire held that it was both impossible and unnecessary to

enlighten more than a small fraction of the population; Frederick believed Enlightenment was reserved for a still smaller percentage.

Consequently, since neither category was generally preponderant for any length of time, it seems apt to classify the general categories "moderate Enlightenment" and "Radical Enlightenment" as two sides of a coin, integral components of a boundless and inseparable duality. This fits with the historical evidence but amounts also to a significant philosophical point. It is entirely basic to the modern dilemma that some, like Diderot, d' Holbach, Helvétius, Condorcet and Auguste Comte, conceive human reason and observational science as the only valid criteria for evaluating propositions and sifting truth from falsity, and hence the sole legitimate basis for morality, education, legislation and social policy, while others claim reason and science grasp only part of reality and that there exists a realm beyond our reason that relies on Revelation, theology and religious authority. Accordingly, for the latter, reason must compromise and accept a balance between the demands of "philosophy" and those of theology. No philosopher can unilaterally adjudicate this wider dilemma, despite Diderot's, d'Holbach's and Comte's claiming that they could, it is simply intrinsic to the human condition.

Even so, if we consider the matter from another perspective and ask which tendency is the main line from the point of view of modern democracy, basic Human Rights, full freedom of expression, secularism and reducing economic inequality, then there can be no question that the Radical Enlightenment overwhelmingly won the argument, in general as well as within the American and French revolutions, decisively defeating the attempts of Mounier, Malouet, Barnave, on the one hand, and Adams, Hamilton and Morris on the other, to steer the revolutions toward informal aristocracy, restricted suffrages, mixed government and the British model. By late 1791 the French Revolution had been conquered by the democratic republicanism to which Brissot, Pétion, Bonneville, Carra and many others had adhered long before 1789. The Brissotins were able to gain a predominant position in the National Assembly from late 1791 until June 1793, and heavily dominated the constitutional commission, headed by Condorcet, which in February 1793 drew up the world's first democratic constitution. Admittedly, the radicals were overthrown by authoritarian populists aiming at dictatorship and suppression of basic freedoms, and replaced by the Montagnard regime and Terror (1793-1794), but not for long and, once the Montagne were largely eradicated, by early 1795, a neo-Brissotin tendency with which the young

Benjamin Constant fully sympathized presided over the social and important educational reforms achieved during the late 1790s.<sup>39</sup>

The Radical Enlightenment was radical in a comprehensive fashion, and incomparably so, because the Enlightenment itself set out to improve and elevate human life on so many levels. Historians rightly speak of the Radical Reformation and of radical Islamists, and it is true that with both these comparable general categories, the intention was and is to transform society as a whole, education, general culture and individual lives, and in the most comprehensive manner.<sup>40</sup> But while both aspired to reshape society and public institutions profoundly, they are essentially indifferent to the kind of political structure maintained provided it venerates and imposes religious doctrine on everyone and equally indifferent to whether or not the individual reads or not, develops his or her personal abilities or not, and indeed whether he or she is educated in the sciences and arts, or not, provided he or she imbibes religious doctrine and conforms. By contrast, the Radical Enlightenment was not indifferent to the form of authority and secular institutions but sought the best framework for the personal fulfilment of the maximum number of individuals, and sought to broaden and enrich individual lives by introducing universal education, training individuals not in doctrine but in forming judgments and learning about the sciences. By comparison, that is an incomparably broader framework. To speak as some do today, in Dutch politics for example, as “Enlightenment Fundamentalism” is to be profoundly confused as to the meaning of “Enlightenment.”

The Radical Enlightenment’s most typical as well as greatest representative and spokesman during the French Revolution was undoubtedly Condorcet. This is true both on the institutional front, as he was the first to draft a fully democratic constitution, and on the educational front, as he was the first major architect of universal secular education, an education that he intended to be identical for girls and boys.<sup>41</sup> Contributing to the huge but feeble critical juggernaut, Keith Michael Baker attempted to deny this, objecting that Spinoza, d’Holbach, and Helvétius are not listed by name in the index of Condorcet’s last book, the *Esquisse d’un Tableau historique* (1795).<sup>42</sup> But this is beside the point. What matters in this surpassingly radical work is what Baker leaves unmentioned: Condorcet’s dramatic reversal, so characteristic of Diderot and d’Holbach, of Montesquieu’s

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<sup>39</sup> Israel [2014b] pp. 593–682.

<sup>40</sup> For a comparative discussion, see Mühlpfordt and Weiss [2009] pp. 9–16.

<sup>41</sup> Israel [2014b] pp. 345–348, 358–361, 377–387.

<sup>42</sup> Baker [2014] pp. 46–47.

relativism, his insisting most regimes are bad and that "l'ouvrage des mauvais lois," the effect of bad laws and legislators, is to corrupt law and government, prejudicing the "happiness" of the people, while the churches prevented the people from grasping true morality: the Enlightenment's task is to end this double despotism of kings and priests. Again typically, Condorcet combines these claims with urging the need comprehensively to renew the whole existing framework of laws and institutions together with the entire moral order.<sup>43</sup>

In recounting humanity's breakthrough to emancipation, freedom, and its "happiness," Condorcet attributed this tremendous shift, viewed by him as the most decisive shift in human history, like Palmer later, primarily to the progress of "philosophy" and science. Baker tries to suggest "les philosophes vraiment éclairés" principally driving humanity's progress, in Condorcet's account, do not include Spinoza as if that were a valid criticism. What matters is that Condorcet is contending "philosophy" paved the way to overthrowing the "absurdities" of the theologians and the entire existing system of institutions with these twin goals are presented as tightly linked – the essence of the Radical Enlightenment construct. When in his *Adresse aux Bataves*, and again in the *Tableau*, Condorcet summons the Dutch to remember that they, together with the English, assumed the lead in science and knowledge, as well as in the quest for freedom, before other peoples, but, unfortunately, stopped half way, that the Dutch began the work of "enlightening your enslaved neighbours etc.", it is unlikely that he intended to exclude Spinoza from his eulogy. Even if, highly improbably, he did, it would hardly matter. The objection to including Condorcet in the Radical Enlightenment is wrong and invalid in every conceivable respect.

When describing Condorcet's and Brissot's roles in the French Revolution historians conventionally contrast them with Robespierre and the Montagne, describing the latter as militants or "radicals," and the former as "moderates." The conventional usage here is unfortunate and might easily mislead the reader into supposing that Marat, Robespierre and the Montagne had wider ambitions for basic change, or more sweeping and comprehensive goals of social reform, than the radical enlighteners. But actually what is meant by this kind of category differentiation is that the Montagne were more militant, aggressive, populist, and intolerant than their opponents. Measured by their plans for the republican constitution, education, press freedom, individual freedom of expression, women's organizations, black emancipation, supporting the sciences and religious reform, it is obvious to anyone in the least familiar with the sources that the

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<sup>43</sup> Condorcet [2004] pp. 355–386.

Montagne had far fewer and less sweeping plans for basic change than the Brissotins whom they expelled from the Jacobin Club in the autumn of 1792. Montagnards mainly aimed at dictatorship and suppressing freedom of expression. Many had been reluctant to espouse republicanism even superficially. Thus, for example, where Brissot, Condorcet, Pétion, Bonneville, Carra, and many other leading democratic republicans were convinced republicans before 1789, Robespierre continued to adamantly defend mixed government and constitutional monarchy, and publicly reject republicanism, even after the flight to Varennes (June 1791) throughout the bitterly contested months down to July 1792.

Of course, Robespierre was more ruthless, dictatorial and intolerant than any Brissotin. But measured in terms of intellectual commitment to the principles of republicanism and democracy, he was unquestionably far less radical, his dogmatic and somewhat simplified Rousseauism being mainly deployed to stress the moral purity and excellence of ordinary people, to invoke the alleged unanimity of the people's will, and the overriding superiority of ordinariness as a general criterion, irrespective of whether the common man reads or is educated or not. For this reason, it is entirely wrong to suggest that Marat and Robespierre belonged to the Enlightenment in any sense, or in any of its currents. Robespierre never eulogized philosophy, science and *lumières* in the fashion of Condorcet and the Brissotins; on the contrary, in his political speeches he repeatedly denounced the *philosophes* for betraying Rousseau and the people.<sup>44</sup>

With respect to elevating the individual, broadening education, establishing freedom of thought and expression, cultivating the sciences, putting democratic institutions and laws in place, pursuing racial equality and moving toward gender equality, the Radical Enlightenment was far more and far more comprehensively radical than any other tendency in modern history, in any part of the globe. Neither post-1793 Jacobin militancy, nor Babeuf's proto-socialism in any way contradicts this. This was by no means forgotten, at least among the most insightful and aware, during the period of defeat, reaction and reactionary political culture following the defeat of Napoleon. Veteran *Freiheitsfreunde*, like Börne and Heine, in Germany, strove to keep their cherished radical Enlightenment tradition alive, teaching the Marseillaise, as the latter poetically lamented, to children while rotting away "at home, in prison, or in a garret in exile" like that in which Georg Forster (1754-1794), one of the foremost German

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<sup>44</sup> Israel [2014b] pp. 249-250, 303-304, 358-363, 387-391, 510-511, 615-616.

radical enlighteners, and a renowned ethnologist as well as a leader of the Rhenish democratic republican revolution of 1792–1793, expired in Paris in 1794.<sup>45</sup>

Admittedly, in Germany, France and America alike, as in the rest of the Western world, the radical republicans and democrats were sidelined by conservative forces on the one hand, and, increasingly so, from 1848, by socialism on the other. Heine perfectly understood that the socialists were steadily gaining ground already in the early 1830s. He knew that they shared a common platform with the radical tendency he represented up to a point: they too roundly denounced the 1830 July Revolution for its timid "moderate" ideas and allowing itself to be captured by vested financial interests. But he also recognized that the radical enlightening tendency and socialism whether in its Marxist format or in other varieties, were at bottom two very different and distinct impulses which sought to transform society and the individual in fundamentally different ways. Increasingly, their paths diverged: socialism launched itself in one direction, that of class-warfare and the need to capture control of the means of production and then redistribute wealth, often declaiming dogmatically even about minor matters, in the spirit of Blanqui's "narcissism of small differences." Heine, Börne, Wirth, Michelet, Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin (1807–1874), and others, continued expounding a literary and philosophical radicalism that affirmed the authentic principles of the great French Revolution – basic Human Rights, freedom of expression, democracy, and universal education together with a measure of economic redistribution.

In his *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland (1834)*, a work that provoked a comprehensive ban on Heine's works in both Prussia and the entire German Confederation and those of all of the "Young Germany" movement, Heine held up his philosophical hero, Spinoza, as the emblem of this to his mind higher revolutionary tradition, as the supreme champion of humanity, praising Spinozistic pantheism above deism, Judaism and Christianity, and also as a political and social revolutionary philosophical creed superior to socialism. Spinoza's radicalism, as construed by Heine, underlay and was closely akin to but yet was also at the same time superior to the materialism of the eighteenth-century French *philosophes* and the democratic revolutionaries of 1792–1793. Revolutionary materialism and "Spinozism" both aimed at democratic revolution, contended Heine in 1835, the Spinozists and materialists of the French Revolution were undoubtedly allies. But where the socialists, like some of the revolutionary materialists of 1789–1799, sought to level and reduce the human to the ordinary,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, pp. 318–321, 340–342, 472–473, 639.

the simplistic, the lowest common denominator, the Spinozist, as he understood the radical tendency, sought to elevate, to raise up the lowest and turn everyone into a godlike superhuman: "we want to be neither *sans-culottes*, nor frugal citizens nor mean political leaders; we shall found a democracy of gods, all equally glorious, equally holy, equally joyous."<sup>46</sup> If Heine and Börne detested the authoritarian populism of Robespierre and the Montagne, they also expressed contempt for the "thoughtless multitude" with their populism, nationalism and anti-Semitism and especially, as is well known, German society's general culture and attitudes. But at the same time Heine also considered Germany the most fertile soil in Europe for "Spinozism," what today we call Radical Enlightenment - for building on Spinoza's way of thinking. Pantheism defined as Spinoza's philosophy, held Heine, "is the religion of our greatest thinkers, of our best artists." "Pantheism is the clandestine religion of Germany," contended Heine, "as was predicted fifty years ago by those German writers who campaigned so intensively against Spinoza."<sup>47</sup>

By 1847 socialism and democratic republicanism had definitively parted ways and socialism won the contest for the leadership of the revolutionary impulse in the West. But the Radical Enlightenment was not extinguished yet. The French republican opposition to Louis Philippe's July monarchy fused its democratic rhetoric and publicity efforts into a remarkable series of political banquets (designed to circumvent the laws against political gatherings). These events prominently featured Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc and other adept political orators and electrified Paris and all provincial France. Perhaps the most eloquent, memorable and effective speaker at these banquets predicting the imminence of revolution, and the overthrow of the July monarchy, was Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869). Poet, *littérateur* and friend of Heine, since 1833 Lamartine was also a deputy in the French Legislature where he embodied the classic radical tendency: democracy and universal male suffrage with general emancipation (like Ledru-Rollin urging abolition of slavery), pacifism between democratic peoples, anti-colonialism and admiration of the Great Revolution's heroic democratic republicans - that is Mirabeau, Brissot, Condorcet, Paine, etc. and, not least, rejection of Christianity (he too was a Spinozist pantheist).<sup>48</sup>

In 1847, Lamartine published his best-selling eight-volume *Histoire des Girondins*, soon a key source for such leading American intellectuals as Walt

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<sup>46</sup> Heine [2007] p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 58.

<sup>48</sup> Lamartine [1847] pp. 16-17.

Whitman, Margaret Fuller and Herman Melville,<sup>49</sup> maintaining that “human thought had been renewed in the century of philosophy,” the eighteenth century, but had left its task unfinished: in the mid-nineteenth century it still remained for “l’esprit philosophique” to “transform the social world.”<sup>50</sup> The ideas of the *philosophes*, affirmed Lamartine, were the measure of all good and bad, morally, intellectually, socially and politically. Like Ledru-Rollin, he summoned the French to achieve a renewed revolution on the model of 1792-3 but this time one that would elevate and materialize the “true spirit” of the great Revolution, that of Condorcet and the Brissotins, and emphatically repudiate the leveling *ultra-radicaux* of the Montagne and their turbulent heirs, Babeuf, Buonarroti and the socialists.

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<sup>49</sup> Reynolds [1988] p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> Lamartine [1847] pp. 17–19.

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