

## REVIEW ESSAY

# The Enlightenment We Want

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J. C. D. Clark, *The Enlightenment: An Idea and Its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024)

Richard Whatmore, *The End of Enlightenment: Empire, Commerce, Crisis* (London: Allen Lane, 2023)

Why do we care about the Enlightenment, what it was, whether there was such a thing, who was or was not part of it, whether it ended or not? Do we care about the Renaissance, what it was, where it was, who was or was not part of it, whether it ended or not? What, if anything, do we gain from this kind of questioning? What is achieved by corraling authors, artists, musicians, or public figures under a label? And, more generally, what is the merit of periodization? To be sure, once a period is delineated, named, and taught as such in schools, it invites reflection and, given the critical nature of our intellectual and academic culture, questioning, especially if it and the ideas associated with it are taken for granted. Likewise, the membership of a group which thinks of itself as an entity and gives itself a name, or accepts a given one, will call for probing as to who truly belonged to it and who did not. Questions of this kind stimulate scholarship. They make for a community of thought and divisions within it. Periodization and labels feed discontinuity theses and these in turn nourish continuity arguments. Epochs lend themselves to temporal divisions: early, middle, late antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism, modern, postmodern. Categorizations, one might think, are unlikely to cause much, if any, harm, and they do spur academic enquiry and popular debates. Yet the disputes that arise from some of them might indicate otherwise, and of all the arguments that are to be had about the nature and borders of the various temporal or intellectual categories, those relating to the Enlightenment are probably the most contentious. The principal reason for this is its disputed link to the present, to “modernity.” The origins of what is good or bad about modernity have been, and continue to be, laid at the feet of the Enlightenment. The identity of the Enlightenment matters because it is thought, though not by all, to have engendered us. We are the embodiment either of its false dreams or of its anticipated nightmares. Of course, if it were not for modernity and its discontents, we would not have these two latest books by Richard Whatmore and Jonathan Clark, and that would be regrettable.

Whatmore and Clark are not new to the Enlightenment; indeed, they have already contributed numerous studies on ideas associated with it and authors who lived in the long eighteenth century, the loosely defined period starting in the early or mid-seventeenth century and ending some time towards the mid-nineteenth century, with Descartes or Hobbes and Tocqueville or Hegel as borderers. Both historians have written on the revolutions that took place in that stretch of history. Whatmore has published on David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and Jean-Baptiste Say, amongst others, and Clark on Samuel Johnson and Thomas Paine, as well as Burke, the Glorious Revolution, and the American War of Independence. They are thus well versed in the social and political history of the long eighteenth century, its authors, and the vast scholarship on the period and its leading figures. Both historians are fighters, Clark more vociferously so than Whatmore, but both are fighting mistaken views about the Enlightenment and its posterity. For all their differences in premises and tone, both Whatmore's *The End of Enlightenment* and Clark's *The Enlightenment* fight facile assumptions whether from the liberal or the Marxist or Marxian accounts of the nature and legacies of the Enlightenment. However, that is not all. They also shine a light on some of its (alleged) protagonists independently of their respective relation to the Enlightenment.

In *The Enlightenment: An Idea and Its History*, Clark argues that “the Enlightenment” was not a phenomenon (hence the quotation marks), a thing located within a historical period; crucially that it was not the transition to another phenomenon or thing, namely modernity. At present, Clark contends, “the Enlightenment” has overtaken “the Industrial Revolution,” a favorite in the twentieth century, as the most consequential historiographical concept. He stresses the invention of the idea and its label in various languages, mostly posthumously. While he acknowledges that some academics have begun to question the Enlightenment as a phenomenon, the term's continued use in popular discourse in many parts of the world has problematic implications for understandings not only of their past, but also of their present, and of so called “modernity.” It is unlikely, as Clark must realize, that his weighty tome will make much difference to discussions on the streets or in cafes around the world. Like the Renaissance, the Enlightenment is a catchy label, and both are also alluring ideas. Unlike antiquity or the Middle Ages, which might seem to us closed, self-contained worlds, ones that have truly ended (notwithstanding their enduring appeal or various forms of revivals through the ages), the Enlightenment shares with the Renaissance the pull of a creationist narrative, a time when it all began, and man made man.

The simpler the account of the Enlightenment, the more appealing it first was. When it was just a Parisian affair, consisting of the ideas of a few authors, likely to include those of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, and Kant, and possibly inspired by those of Descartes, Boyle, Locke, Bacon, and/or Newton, it was relatively easy to intuit what was encompassed by “the Enlightenment”—to wit, the critical use of reason, the application of a scientific method, some form of empiricism, anticlericalism, religious toleration, the end of corporal punishments, the spread of knowledge, the advent of the notion of humanity, and beginning of social and political reforms. The Enlightenment vision was thus conceived by its various historians as one in which the world could and would be perfected. In time, the Enlightenment was enlarged geographically to Scotland and

Naples thanks to the scholarship of John Robertson and others, and embraced the rest of Europe with works such as Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich's edited volume *The Enlightenment in National Context*. As names and places were added to the company of the *philosophes*, the adherence to any sort of common creed became increasingly difficult to establish. Frontiers dissipated and so did the cruder assumptions about all aspects of what one might have taken the Enlightenment to be as an intellectual movement; indeed, whether it even could be considered a movement became a reasonable question. With the close reading of texts, especially of the lesser known works within the corpus of the pillars of the Enlightenment and their correspondence, historians faced a choice: excluding or marginalizing from membership of the Enlightenment club the believers, the pessimists, the epistemological skeptics, those doubtful about the possibility or desirability of "progress" and of the coming of perpetual peace, or ceasing to use the label altogether. Perhaps Voltaire might be left standing, but however exclusive its membership, a club, one would think, needs to be larger than a dinner party.

There is another, rather awkward, possibility, namely to sever authors from themselves in so far as some of their works fit or do not fit into the prescribed canon of Enlightenment beliefs. Thus Diderot, the author of the disturbing dialogue *Le neveu de Rameau*, could be deemed to be another Diderot from the famed encyclopedist, the seemingly sure-footed cataloguer and disseminator of knowledge. Hume of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Part I, could be set apart from Hume the historian or essayist. In some ways, this would be true to the spirit of their respective philosophies: skepticism was best left in the back of a drawer or within the confines of one's study. Judging by *Le neveu de Rameau* and *Le rêve de d'Alembert*, Diderot appears to have thought the idea of the continuity of personal identity more problematic than that of its discontinuity, and may well have been at ease with the idea of multiple Diderots. Perhaps such splits are not so challenging after all; we do speak of early and late Platonic dialogues, for instance. Authors change, develop, alter, or abandon ideas and sometimes also return to some of them. However, boxing any of them under the label "Enlightenment" will not evade the problem: it will require something of an agreed Enlightenment credo.

Such flights of fancy will be unnecessary, if we heed Clark and his history of the fabrication of the idea of the Enlightenment. The tribulations of this notion are well recounted in *The Enlightenment*, and its dust jacket, featuring the image of a shattering light bulb by the photographer and 3D artist Gualtiero Boffi, is well chosen. The book counts the ways not of the end of the Enlightenment, because demise implies existence, but of its nothingness, its irreality. Its critique covers a good deal of ground, and, whatever one's attachment to the idea of the Enlightenment, Clark's work is instructive as well as challenging. The heavy-duty historiographical artillery it targets on the idea of the Enlightenment does require, at least initially, some training in the history of histories, but the book also imparts some such schooling as it proceeds on its demolition work.

Like Clark's previous works, this is a book for and about historians. It seeks to show us at which point any given historian might have taken a wrong turn and come to believe in a reality that never was. It does this not only by pointing to misleading theorists or nefarious influencers, but by saying what might be deemed more than enough about them that we should not fail to appreciate the ideological luggage with which

their interpretation of the past might be lumbered. Thus, of the first *bête noire*, Jürgen Habermas, we are told that he is a sociologist whose *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Concept of Bourgeois Society* was first published in 1962: “This was Habermas’s *Habilitationsschrift*, begun under Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer ... finished at the University of Marburg under the supervision of a former Marxist, Wolfgang Abendroth, to whom the book is dedicated, and who later published *A History of the European Working Class* (London 1972)” (41). This account is repeated in one of the last chapters with additions: “Prominent also was the Marxist Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929). His father had been a member of the Nazi party; Jürgen had himself been a leader in the Jungvolk, part of the Hitler Youth, but then adopted opposite political views” (451). Similarly, we learn that “Reinhard Koselleck (1923–2006) had been a member of the Hitler Youth, had served in the German army on the eastern front, was captured and held in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp; after release, his career as an historian was informed by his experience of natural defeat, failure, and conflict, not by the assumptions of spreading rationality” (452). Really? Do we think Koselleck slept through postwar Germany? The economic powerhouse? Reunification and all that? Both he and Habermas lived, taught, and wrote in the second half of the twentieth century. Pinning authors like butterflies in the political associations of their youth, let alone those of their fathers, is unbecoming in a history seeking to dismantle prevailing stereotypes of Enlightenment figures. Still, whatever one makes of these “biographical” insertions and of Clark’s ready-made rejections of all things Marxian, *The Enlightenment: An Idea and Its History* is a must on undergraduate reading lists.

The reason for this is that it rightly encourages its readers to continue to question the blanket ascription of an ideology to a period and to its prominent intellectual figures. It shows who uses the term “Enlightenment,” and when, where, and why. While the book questions “the still-widespread assumption that philosophers designed the Enlightenment as an austere cerebral phenomenon,” it also queries what might be construed as an alternative, namely “that the Enlightenment was a social formation, a set of widespread and daily practices including reading, sociability, science, and curiosity, that changed daily life in ways that the authors of academic philosophical treatises neither intended nor unintentionally achieved” (37). It makes us think, amongst other things, about politeness and whether there was all that much of it in eighteenth-century England. It also asks us to consider coffeehouses. “Where recent historiography has sought to assimilate coffee houses to an ideal type, fitting the ‘paradigms of a burgeoning sphere, wider political participation, more rational approach to debate, and the dissemination of natural philosophy,’” Clark argues, “the reality was diverse; contrary cases can be found” (56). The thousands of coffeehouses overlapped with inns, taverns, and alehouses and evolved with them over the eighteenth century. They are not best thought of as a separate sphere, distinct from the rest of society or its government. Without wishing to deny coffeehouses any importance, Clark seeks to remind readers of their association at the time not only with politeness and the dissemination of knowledge, but also with the dissolution of manners and morals. In a similar way, he challenges the idea of the salon as some kind of proto-democratic and egalitarian space in which women held a place. Salons varied in kind, style, and composition throughout Europe and the discussions within their walls reflected that. “Neither *salons* nor coffee houses were university seminars *avant la lettre*,” Clark contends (64). Neither displayed

a Habermasian bourgeois public sphere, in his view, and, in any event, coffeehouses were nothing like Parisian salons.

Clark insists that he is neither pro nor contra the Enlightenment and modernity. What he wishes to highlight is the complexity and diversity of ideas that emerged in the period in which “the Enlightenment” is considered to have taken place. His is a methodologically self-conscious work, with introductions that delineate what the book in its entirety and what each of its parts does and does not seek to accomplish. The principal introduction is to be commended as an inducement not only to reflect on what “the Enlightenment” might mean, but likewise whether one should speak unthinkingly of, say, the scientific revolution or treat the American Revolution as a single political event. There is much, besides, to intrigue in Clark’s history. It offers an interesting bibliography that is divided neither alphabetically nor between primary and secondary sources, but by date from 1655, under which it lists a single volume, Thomas Stanley’s *The History of Philosophy*, to 2023, which features four works, including Clark’s own “‘Lockean Liberalism’ and ‘Classical Republicanism’: The Formation, Function and Failure of the Categories.” This is in keeping, as Clark explains, with the central purpose of this book, which “is to trace the interconnections of history and historiography over a long period” (485).

Mirroring the exponential increase in attention she is receiving worldwide, both Clark and Whatmore speak of Wollstonecraft. Clark’s Wollstonecraft is not best understood as a rights theorist. Her vocabulary and concerns, he believes, are not those “that most present-day readers expect” (214). Clark wants to wrestle her out of a mix of false assumptions: that she cared more for reason than for virtue, that she wished for a political and economic equality, that she was indifferent to morals and those of women in particular, that her belief in God was of little consequence, that she agreed with Rousseau on all things apart from his education for Sophie as outlined in *Émile*, and so forth. He illustrates his perception of her with an account of a little-known meeting she secured with Samuel Johnson shortly before his death in December 1784, thus long before her authorship of the *Vindications*. In subsequent years, she related to Godwin how kind Johnson had been and how he had hoped she would return to visit him often. Once known, this encounter is surprising only if one has a very skewed view of the elderly man and his young admirer. There is no doubt that she esteemed Johnson, that she commended reading him in her anthology of 1789, and that they shared much, including an Anglican background, and would have had much to say to one another. In and of itself, this anecdote says no more about Wollstonecraft than does the fact that Godwin took a strong dislike to her when they first met in 1791. She would not stop arguing. He wanted to hear Paine, not her. Yet he fathered Mary Shelley with her a few years later. While the anecdote does not accomplish as much as Clark might wish, he is right to seek to dismantle the remaining anachronistic and inaccurate conceptions of Wollstonecraft. Thankfully, the time is passing for undoing the crassest misunderstandings of this eighteenth-century author, and of what constituted feminism then and may do so now.

Whatmore also wants us to reconsider the nature of the Enlightenment. His cast list overlaps with Clark’s as he writes on Hume, Smith, Burke, Paine, and Wollstonecraft. He also offers chapters on Shelburne’s circle, Catherine Macaulay, Edward Gibbon, and Jacques-Pierre Brissot. Each chapter title terminates with an end—“David Hume and

the End of the World,” “Shelburne, His Circle and the End of Britain”—and Macaulay signals the end of liberty, Gibbon that of republics, Burke of Europe, Brissot of empire, Paine of revolution, and Wollstonecraft of equality. Dedicated to John Pocock, the book is prefaced by several helpful maps: Europe in 1648, states that appeared and disappeared before and after the French Revolution, the republics that arose in its wake, and the mercantile empires in 1815.

This is a book about worries. Whatmore sets the tone with an introductory sketch of Hume’s intellectual trajectory, one starting with Hume’s early belief that the age of superstition was being superseded and ending with the fear, in Hume’s later years, that a new fanaticism was arising, namely that of the relentless pursuit of wealth, not only by individuals, but by states within a global order “whose political and economic systems become fundamentally dependent on war” (xxxii). Whereas Whatmore’s Hume saw glimmers of light in the end of religious conflict, my Hume was never optimistic about anything much. What with his mother being widowed when David was just two, his nervous breakdown in his late teens, his view that *A Treatise of Human Nature* had fallen, as he put it, “dead-born from the press,” and his failure to secure an academic post given his reputed atheism and the strength of the Kirk, one might expect him to have mixed views about life from the start. True, his *Essays*, his *Enquiries*, and his *History of England* were very successful, and he was feted in Paris. His *My Own Life*, written when he knew of his terminal disease, shows him to have been immensely proud of the money he made through his publications, as well as to have been pleasing to the ladies. That he did not marry, he wants us to know, was not for lack of appeal. He was of good cheer and considered good company by both the sexes on both sides of the Channel. That does not make one oblivious to the limits of human understanding as he showed them to be to Kant and all who care to read his *Treatise* or to what he wrote of the frailty of human nature in his *Essays*.

Hume had learnt the limits of reason and certitude as he wrote the *Treatise* and realized that the most important building bricks of our knowledge of the physical world, such as causation, and of moral theory, such as the self, lacked the empirical foundation he had hoped to find for them in order to proceed with the task he had set himself, namely to ground a moral theory in human nature. Thus he had to be an epistemological skeptic from his twenties thanks to his own pursuit of certainty. As suggested earlier, the Hume of the *Essays* is one who leaves his skeptical self in his study, and endeavors to walk a middle course between the extreme political views and the partisanship of his time, in pouring oil on troubled waters. Whether he was ever as optimistic as Whatmore suggests about the end of religious enthusiasm and fanaticism is a contentious matter, given that the Kirk closed the door to his academic appointment. Then there is the matter of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, Hume’s reaction to its harsh suppression, and his concern about the rise of political parties and the political entrenchment that came with it. Hume is unlikely to have had but the most momentary periods of optimism about anything much. Recall what he wrote about his *History of England* in the brief autobiography he composed near the end of life:

I thought that I was the only historian, that had at once neglected present power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular prejudices; and as the subject was suited to every capacity, I expected proportional applause. But miserable was my

disappointment: I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation; English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier, united in their rage against the man, who had presumed to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I. and the Earl of Strafford; and after the first ebullitions of their fury were over, what was still more mortifying, the book seemed to sink into oblivion.<sup>1</sup>

Such was his disappointment on this occasion, by no means the first, that he resolved to move permanently to France: “had not the war been at that time breaking out between France and England, I had certainly retired to some provincial town of the former kingdom, have changed my name, and never more have returned to my native country.”<sup>2</sup> Whatever his worries about the prospect of war in the future, he certainly had cause to have them throughout his life. One might say that with Hume there was no end to the Enlightenment, because there was never much of it to begin with, if one thinks of it in terms of confidence in the power of reason, the reign of toleration, and the likelihood of tranquillity at home and international peace. That is why Hume thought it was important for people such as him to labor to calm and rein in public opinion and alert all about the dangers of rising public debt and thus a commercial age that seemed to lose all restraint. Whatmore is indeed right in seeing Hume’s writings as exemplifying some of the great concerns of his age.

It is also right to see in Wollstonecraft someone who thought that the spirit of commerce was corrupting humanity and deeply worried that what she argued had been a very uneven progress of civilization seemed to be turning to worse. Yet once again it is difficult to find her to be a standard-bearer of the Enlightenment as commonly, if not vulgarly, conceived. Whatmore argues that in the early 1790s “both Godwin and Wollstonecraft were committed to a far more extensive enlightenment than had existed hitherto in human societies, entailing toleration and peace but also far greater equality between ranks and genders, all conversing together” (259). That both authors thought the world wanting in every respect there is no doubt. Leaving aside the differences between the moral and political visions of this late wedded couple, Wollstonecraft was herself, for a start, far from being a paragon of toleration. While in her 1790 review of John Holloway’s *A Letter to the Rev. Dr Price, containing a few Strictures upon his Sermon lately published, entitled “The Love of our Country”* (1789) she agreed with him in his rebuke of “an offensive passage in Dr P’s sermon, relative to methodism,” and noted that the proof of the validity of Holloway’s objection was that Price had “expunged the harsh epithets objected to, and softened the whole paragraph, in the third edition of the sermon,” her tone in what followed might disappoint:

No liberal minded man, who has paid any attention to the subject, can contradict Mr H’s assertion, that among the methodists there are a number of useful members of society, sincere, respectable people; nay it appears certain, that many of

<sup>1</sup>David Hume, *Essays: Moral; Political; and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Liberty Fund, Inc., 1985), ProQuest Ebook Central, at <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/upenn-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3327>, xxxvii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



their itinerant preachers have done good, by addressing a class of men, too much neglected by the regular clergy of every denomination.

Methodists should not be ridiculed, she continued, and “persecution is out of the question.”<sup>3</sup> Methodists must have sighed with relief on reading this. Condescension with regard to their sect, of course, pales in comparison to her thoughts on Catholics for much, if not all, of her life. It was only when she traveled through Scandinavia that her views of Catholics and certainly the French softened. As for Godwin, he did wish for an end, the end of toleration, the end of the need for any form of religious toleration.

If Wollstonecraft was not a clear model of toleration on paper or in person, then neither was she of cosmopolitanism. While she wrote that one needed to exercise caution on ascribing a character to a people, she did not overly hesitate in doing so. This is most obvious in her *Letter on the Character of the French Nation* written shortly after her arrival in France in December 1792 and dated February 1793. This brief text shows a disillusionment with the French Revolution, especially if one takes it to have been the work of a former enthusiast. While Whatmore does not engage with it, the *Letter* would seem to provide ammunition to his thesis that some of the principal political dreams of the Enlightenment quickly came to an end and that some of their authors lived to see the withering of the world for which they longed.

Wollstonecraft’s *Letter* contrasts the French national character to that of the English. She thought the French frivolous, trifling with time, vain, and “the most sensual people in the world; and what can render the heart so hard, or so effectually stifle every moral emotion, as the refinement of sensuality?”<sup>4</sup> She did not wish to denigrate a people, she insisted, but to situate them within a stage in civilization. What she saw was confusing and disheartening as she contemplated the bloody spectacle of “the aristocracy of birth ... levelled with the ground, only to make room for that of riches.”<sup>5</sup> She found the ways of Providence to be “inscrutable,”<sup>6</sup> and while she insisted that she had not “become an Atheist ... by residing in Paris; yet I begin to fear that vice, or, if you will, evil, is the grand mobile of action, and that, when the passions are justly poised, we become harmless, and in the same proportion useless.” Imagination made us restless in our desire for needless things and the ingratitude of those we tried to assist dampened our desire to be useful to others. To be sure, the last place to bear witness of the benefits of the revolution would be Paris, given what she saw as its moral depravity. Nonetheless, she now doubted that a return to a purity of morals was possible once a certain stage of artificiality and selfishness had been reached, once a people was “emasculated by pleasure” and “the luxuries of prosperity are become the wants of nature.”<sup>7</sup> She hoped that a fairer day would dawn on Europe, but warned “that little is to be expected from the narrow principle of commerce which seems every where to be shoving aside *the point of honour of the noblesse*.” While she owned that it might be too soon to have an

<sup>3</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Analytical Review* 6 (1790), in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, with Emma Rees-Mogg, 7 vols. (London, 1989), 7: 199.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.



opinion on “the future government, yet it is impossible to avoid hazarding some conjectures, when everything whispers to me that names, not principles, are changed ... and every petty municipal officer, become the idol, or rather the tyrant of the day, stalks like a cock on a dunghill.”<sup>8</sup> If anyone vindicates Whatmore’s thesis, it is Wollstonecraft.

Indeed, while she reassessed her views of Parisians and noted that they were more restrained than she initially thought and certainly so in relation to drinking than the northerners, she was to go further in her critique of commerce and speculation and their effects on the character and minds of those engaged in them in *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796). “A man ceases to love humanity,” she wrote, “and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth; as one clashes with his interest, the other with his pleasures: to business, as it is termed, every thing must give way; nay, is sacrificed; and all the endearing charities of citizen, husband, father, brother, become empty names.”<sup>9</sup> In her penultimate letter, she confessed,

During my present journey, and whilst residing in France, I have had an opportunity of peeping behind the scenes of what are vulgarly termed great affairs, only to discover the mean machinery which has directed many transactions of moment. The sword has been merciful, compared with the depredations made on human life by contractors, and by the swarm of locusts who have battened on the pestilence they spread abroad. These men, like the owners of negro ships, never smell on their money the blood by which it has been gained, but sleep quietly in their beds, terming such occupations lawful callings; yet the lightning marks not their roofs, to thunder conviction on them, “and to justify the ways of God to man.”<sup>10</sup>

The long eighteenth century saw a great deal. Unsurprisingly, reflective authors who witnessed these events had complex and divergent responses to them. They traveled in Europe and beyond, read about the rest of the world, and corresponded with one another. Their ideas were not static. How could they be? Clark and Whatmore are justified in forcing us to be cautious in our assumptions about each and every one of the authors they discuss and the extraordinary intellectual and literary period in which they lived. Both historians warn us not to look to Enlightenment figures for comforting support for our most cherished social and political values or optimism in our hopes for reformist programs.

Short of ceasing to study history, which neither historian proposes, quite to the contrary, with what, one might wonder, will their cautionary tales leave us? We might cease to gather authors under one banner, the Enlightenment. We might cease to think of it as having been oblivious to the potential destructiveness of commerce and stupidly optimistic about the prospect of toleration and peace. Yet, given that we, like the members of the eighteenth-century Dijon Academy and of other setters of essay competitions and their respondents, like Rousseau, continue to believe that understanding begins

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 446, original emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 344.

with a quest for origins, we are unlikely to cease looking into the past for beginnings. We will still search for the parentage of our present condition or that of others. The *Ur*-parents might change. The outlooks we seek to trace might also. And thus, to return to the introductory questions, we care about what the Enlightenment was and who was or was not part of it because we need genealogies, even of despair, anguish, and confusion. And if the long eighteenth century does not provide them, we will look further back in time or elsewhere. Such quests will never absolve us from taking responsibility for our present situation.