
**Frederick G. Whelan.** ***Enlightenment Political Thought and Non-Western Societies: Sultans and Savages***
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Frederick G. Whelan. *Enlightenment Political Thought and Non-Western Societies: Sultans and Savages*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Pp. xiii + 227. ISBN 0-415-99928-6, cloth, $105.00.

It is often said that the Enlightenment was a cosmopolitan age, and this truism would be difficult to dispute. Philosophers of "natural rights" argued powerfully for the existence of a single moral community made up of all human beings—and reformers ultimately succeeded in putting this ideal into practice, most notably with their abolition of the slave trade. Meanwhile, philosophers of the period had an abiding fascination with foreign cultures, with many people, Locke among them, eagerly scrutinizing travellers' accounts of their trips to non-European nations and theorizing about the reasons for the diversity in human manners and behavior to which these accounts testified. Robert Boyle even composed a set of guidelines for the philosophical traveler, which he published in the transactions of the Royal Society in 1666. Yet strangely, especially given the current fascination with cosmopolitanism and multi-culturalism among philosophers, no comprehensive treatment of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism has yet appeared. However, we are beginning to see the regular publication of more specialized studies, and Frederick Whelan's interesting book is a noteworthy entry in this genre.

The book collects papers that have either been published elsewhere or presented at conferences, and the chapters are not linked together by a single thesis or argument. Whelan's previous work has focused on Hume, and the longest of the book's chapters is devoted to "Hume and the Non-Western World." Whelan does an excellent job of bringing together Hume's many comments about non-Western cultures, and offers an interesting discussion concerning the problem of Hume's apparent racism. However, the chapter leaves many questions about the relationship between his approach to cultural diversity and his larger philosophy unanswered. We are, for instance, offered no discussion of how our moral sentiments work both to create parochial biases in our judgments and motivate us to overcome them. (Hume says that sympathy leads us naturally to privilege those who are closest to or most resemble us, yet the very "notion of morals" implies a sentiment "so universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind" EPM 9.5; SBN 272). Surprisingly, the text where Hume considers issues of cultural diversity most explicitly (and most philosophically), the "Dialogue" that concludes the second *Enquiry*, receives only passing notice.

Whelan concludes his chapter with a brief reflection on Hume and the question of empire. He suggests that Hume has surprisingly little to say on this topic, and this is perhaps true relative to the size of his corpus. But Whelan ignores

much of what Hume does say. Hume offers reflections on the Roman empire, the Norman conquest, and on James I's conquest of Ireland that are highly pertinent to Whelan's discussion, and that present a view on empire that is, in the mind of this reviewer at least, clear and consistent. He calls the Romans "those civilized conquerors," and in discussing James's invasion draws a distinction between "the vain and criminal glory of conquests" and the harsh but benevolent rule of a civilized empire such as the king's (David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols. [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983], 1:226 and 5:49, respectively). Whelan correctly notes the importance of Hume's distinction between barbarous and civilized societies, but does not subject this distinction to the close examination that his chosen topic would seem to demand.

The book's second chapter deals with the question of how the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers regarded the "rude nations" of North America. The third discusses Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron's response to Montesquieu on the question of oriental despotism. The fourth examines Burke's views on India, while the final chapter deals with Hegel and the "Oriental" world. Whelan does not attempt to connect the ideas he examines to those of modern theorists, with the (perhaps unavoidable) exception of Edward Said. His methodology is predominantly that of textual exposition. Whelan is a careful reader and patient expositor, who brings together a wide range of texts from each author he examines. Though I am not an expert on all of the thinkers covered, I certainly felt myself under reliable guidance throughout. Whelan quotes generously from his primary texts, and, like any good guide to a foreign land, has an eye for features of particular interest, pointing them out even as he continues to move the discussion forward. The thinkers on which the various chapters focus are obviously those in which Whelan is particularly interested, and a reader content to accept his choices will benefit from his engaging tour.

Whelan suggests that his eclectic organization is in fact dictated by his subject matter. He says in his afterward that "it is difficult, actually, to specify the defining content of Enlightenment thought, and impossible to define an 'Enlightenment project' in a way that adequately incorporates the ideas of the acknowledged leading thinkers of eighteenth-century Europe" (169). Kant disagreed with this, of course, and so have many people since. This reviewer certainly would have liked Whelan to be more ambitious in attempting to address the broad questions raised by the book's sweeping title. Even if one believes that generalizations about the "Enlightenment project" can only be reductive and inaccurate, it would certainly have been possible to add additional chapters (the book is not long) in order to give a fuller picture of the topic, as promised by the book's title. For instance, an examination of Bayle and Voltaire might have given the reader a better sense of

the way in which accounts of non-Western societies were deployed to undermine religious orthodoxy, while the discussion of Hegel might have been preceded by some consideration of Herder and other early German theorists of cultural difference. Among other topics, this would allow the author to raise, if not resolve, the question of whether or not we should accept the traditional picture, that a discourse of Romanticism emerged to re-configure or challenge the rational cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment.

Whelan could also have been more thorough in his discussion of the relevant secondary literature. Jonathan Israel, whose massive books on the Enlightenment contain much of relevance to the author's theme, is absent from the bibliography, as is David Armitage's important book *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Pioneering works by Anthony Padgen, Jennifer Pitts, and Sankar Muthu are all listed but not discussed, or are mentioned only in passing. Whelan has thus missed an opportunity to give the reader a sense of the vitality with which these themes are currently being debated by philosophers and historians—with many of them offering the kinds of ambitious theses about the phenomenon of the Enlightenment that Whelan eschews. We have come, it is fair to say, far beyond Said, and it would have been interesting to know Whelan's views on this recent work.

The chapter on Burke suffers particularly from this absence. The chapter is somewhat anomalous in its structure. Whelan lays out Said's model of orientalism, which was developed as a critique of nineteenth century writers. He then assesses the degree to which Burke fits this model, and can thus be characterized as an orientalist. He goes back and forth between Said and Burke, laying out a characteristic of orientalism that Said identifies and then testing Burke to see if he possesses it. Whelan's conclusion is that to some degree Burke can be considered an orientalist, though in many ways he cannot. This is hardly surprising. Burke belonged to an earlier era, and it is not especially helpful to see his views teleologically, as part of a "discourse of empire" that was in the process of being formed but had not quite been finalised yet. It would have been much more illuminating to test Burke against models of imperial ideology proposed specifically for the eighteenth century, such as those mentioned above, and to compare and contrast him with the views of his own contemporaries—his great antagonist Warren Hastings being an obvious candidate. What, exactly, were these two men disputing about during their epic confrontation—differing visions of empire, of India, of administrative ethics, or of something else altogether?

It will ultimately be a matter of the reader's personal taste whether or not the book's eclecticism constitutes a weakness or a strength. Whelan introduces her to texts, such as those of Anquetil-Duperron, which she is unlikely to encounter otherwise, and he provides an interesting perspective on more familiar ones, such as those of Hume and Burke. His theme is unquestionably one of considerable

interest to both scholars and students, and indeed professors may find this book contains much material on which they may draw in order to give lectures on Enlightenment philosophy relevance to a modern audience.

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