

PHASES AND SETTINGS OF ENLIGHTENMENT: A REASSESSMENT

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As a subject of historical enquiry, the Enlightenment seems to be in good health. The present volume, whose papers cover Enlightenment across Spain and beyond, is itself evidence of the extent to which scholars are asking new questions of the subject. Striking too is the conviction, which is once again widespread in Enlightenment studies, and which was evident at the conference from which the volume derives, that the Enlightenment was, in its time, a force for good. Its twin aspirations to enlighten by extending the intellectual scope and social boundaries of public discussion, and to understand and improve the human condition on this earth, still seem to us to be laudable and to merit celebration.

Such optimism (if I am right in believing that it exists and is widely shared) recalls the first heyday of historical study of the Enlightenment, in the 1950s and 1960s. Before then, study of the Enlightenment was largely the preserve of philosophers and literary scholars. In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they had gradually faced down the negative connotations which had been attached to Enlightenment by those who thought the French Revolution had been a *philosophe* conspiracy. It was philosophers who introduced the terms 'Enlightenment' and 'Illuminismo' into English and Italian in the later

nineteenth century¹. In the German and, in due course, English-speaking worlds the classic account of Enlightenment understood in these terms was Ernst Cassirer's *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (1932), which was translated into English in 1951. Although Cassirer, who fled Germany to escape persecution as a Jew, was reticent in proclaiming allegiance to Enlightenment values, his book established the scholarly credentials of the subject². The outlook for Enlightenment improved still further after the Second World War. Historians now joined the philosophers and literary scholars in study of the Enlightenment, and brought to their subject a conviction that here, at least, was a period in Europe's past which was worth celebrating. Continental European and European-American historians in particular turned to the Enlightenment as evidence that nineteenth-century Europe's decline into Fascism and National Socialism was not fore-ordained.

The Enlightenment as historians reconstructed it after the War had several prominent features. It was an intellectual movement of the laity, and its values were strongly secular. The Enlightenment's adherents were critical of the churches, and of clerical pretensions; many of them were also hostile to revealed religion. It was a movement cosmopolitan in outlook and international in its scope: though Paris was its undisputed centre, enlightenment was taken to have radiated outwards to Germany and to Italy. In the Italian case (and indeed the German too), adherents of Enlightenment were also, as Franco Venturi insisted, self-consciously 'patriotic': they were committed to reforming their own societies in ways which made local sense of their universal goals³. These goals in turn were widely understood by historians to be those of 'modernisation'. Enlightenment thinkers and activists were seen to

(1) James SCHMIDT, 'Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians, and the *Oxford English Dictionary*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003), pp. 421-43. I do not know when *Ilustración* came into use, and whether it was coined by philosophers, literary scholars, or historians.

(2) Ernst CASSIRER, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1932); *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1952). See J. K. WRIGHT, "'A bright clear mirror": Cassirer's *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*', in K. M. Baker and P. H. Reill (eds), *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 71-101.

(3) Franco VENTURI, 'Preface' to *Italy and the Enlightenment: Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century*, ed. S. J. Woolf, (London, 1972).

have conceptualised ‘the progress of society’, which they cast in terms of a forward-moving development from ‘barbarism’ to commerce and ‘civilisation’. Reconstructed in these terms, the Enlightenment was implicitly if not explicitly taken to have been ‘a good thing’. More often than not it was a Left-Liberal cause, studied by scholars, like Venturi, who were hostile to the materialist determinism of orthodox Marxism. But it was equally congenial as a subject of study to liberal conservatives, such as the English historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, whose discovery of the Enlightenment historians in the early 1960s converted him to intellectual history⁴. With this broad appeal, the historical study of the Enlightenment flourished in the era of the Cold War.

The philosophers, however, had not let go of what had formerly been their preserve. Immediately after the War, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno had turned on the Enlightenment, identifying it as the philosophic begetter of Modernism and its National Socialist disciples⁵. Initially overwhelmed by the historians’ enthusiasm for their new-found subject, this critique resurfaced with a vengeance in the 1980s, in the Postmodernist assault on the ‘Enlightenment Project’. Defined with some precision by a philosopher (Alasdair Macintyre) as the search for ‘an independent rational justification for morality’, the ‘project’ was later expanded to include almost any consequence of adhering to a supposedly ‘universal’ set of values⁶.

It was an attack which caught historians unawares, and put Enlightenment studies on the back foot for most of the 1980s and 1990s. In response, historians tended to take refuge in the growing complexity of their accounts of Enlightenment. The complexity was a product of already existing trends in Enlightenment scholarship, which included a broadening of the range of intellectual interests that counted as ‘enlightened’, and a converse tendency to concentrate on Enlightenment in specific ‘national contexts’. The latter was par-

(4) Hugh TREVOR-ROPER, ‘The Historical philosophy of the Enlightenment’, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, XXVII (1963), pp. 1667-1687.

(5) Max HORKHEIMER and Theodor ADORNO, *Die Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam, 1947).

(6) Alasdair MACINTYRE, *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory* (London, 1981).

ticularly popular among anglophone scholars, who thereby brought the existence of Scottish, North American and even English Enlightenments to the attention of their European colleagues⁷. On the continent, meanwhile, scholars interested in religion began to challenge the assumption that Enlightenment was always secular: they now canvassed the possibility that Enlightenment could have been confessionally aligned, making it Protestant or Catholic depending on its adherents' location and commitments⁸. The ensuing complexity encouraged many scholars to speak of Enlightenments, in the plural, instead of the singular Enlightenment. This made it easy to deny that there had ever been a single 'Enlightenment project', as the philosophers alleged⁹. But it also encouraged the fragmenting of Enlightenment as a subject of study, while conceding that there had been little or no coherence to Enlightenment thinking.

A more positive response to the Postmodern critique derived from aligning the Enlightenment with the idea of an emerging 'public sphere'. Ironically, the idea's author, Jürgen Habermas, was a philosopher (and he in turn had derived it from an eighteenth-century philosopher, Immanuel Kant). Once historians had grasped the idea, however, they were able to use it to identify Enlightenment with a new social setting, and new forms of communication¹⁰. In many places, it could be argued, a 'public sphere' had come into existence independent of the ruler's

(7) Roy PORTER and Mikulas TEICH, *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981).

(8) For example, Mario ROSA, 'Introduzione all' Aufklärung cattolica in Italia', in M. Rosa (ed.), *Cattolicesimo e lumi nel Settecento italiano* Italia Sacra, Studi e documenti di storia ecclesiastica, (Rome, 1981), pp. 1-47.

(9) James SCHMIDT, 'What Enlightenment project?', *Political Theory* 28 (2000), pp. 734-57.

(10) Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). Although first published in German in 1962, it was its English translation which triggered widespread interest in applying the idea of the 'public sphere' to Enlightenment: early responses included Anthony La Vopa, 'Conceiving a public: ideas and society in eighteenth-century Europe', *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), pp. 79-116, and Margaret C. Jacob, 'The mental landscape of the public sphere: a European perspective', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (1994), pp. 95-113.

court and the government; within it, print and conversation enabled the literate and articulate to discuss how to behave in society and to better their condition without effective oversight by religious and political authorities. The resulting conception of Enlightenment as a new culture of communication was further reinforced as historians registered the continued relevance to the eighteenth century of ‘the republic of letters’. A pre-existing network of men of letters, whose reach had been greatly extended at the end of the seventeenth century, the ‘republic of letters’ appeared to combine quite easily with the idea of a public sphere, confirming that Enlightenment was best understood as a social and cultural practice, rather than as an intellectual ‘project’.

Thanks to these defensive measures, the historians seem to have beaten off the Postmodern philosophers’ challenge, and to have discredited the idea of an ‘Enlightenment project’. In the current decade, several new approaches to the Enlightenment have shown few or no inhibitions in proclaiming the subject’s merits. One of these has been Jonathan Israel’s extraordinarily energetic extension of the Enlightenment back into the late seventeenth century, to support the argument that ‘the real business of Enlightenment’ had been achieved by 1740, through the elaboration and dissemination of Spinoza’s radical metaphysics of nature. A subsequent, no less substantial volume has modified the argument, the better to suggest that if one phase of Enlightenment was over by the mid eighteenth century, the battle lines of another had already been drawn¹¹. In a rather different rhetorical vein, I have myself made a case for the Enlightenment as a unitary intellectual movement by means of a comparative study of its genesis and development in two very different ‘national’ contexts, at the opposite ends of Europe, Scotland and Naples¹². Meanwhile other scholars have been exploring ways in which Enlightenment was communicated across frontiers. In this Enlightenment, national contexts are no longer studied in isolation, but are treated as opportunities for ‘transnational’ exchange, through

(11) Jonathan I. ISRAEL, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford 2001), followed (and modified) by *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford, 2006).

(12) John ROBERTSON, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005).

imitation and translation. Hence the rapid expansion of Enlightenment studies, to include Northern and Eastern Europe, Central and South America and India. In the eyes of some scholars, we are fast approaching an Enlightenment which had no single centre and no ‘peripheries’¹³.

Another fresh approach has brought women within the Enlightenment on a significant scale. It is perhaps here that the contribution of the related concepts of the republic of letters and the public sphere has been most fruitful. The former underpinned Dena Goodman’s reassessment of the role of the Parisian *salonnières* as intermediaries and patrons of the *philosophes*; the latter provides an explanatory context in which to appreciate the sheer variety of women’s literary and intellectual achievements in the eighteenth century, as these are revealed by the compendium *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, published just two years ago, in 2005¹⁴. In the light of these initiatives, it looks very much as if the historians have won their Enlightenment back from the Postmodern critics. Once again, it seems, we are confident that we are studying a subject which matters, and which has value.

But there is a danger here, of which I think we should be wary. It is the danger of self-indulgence, of fashioning and pursuing an Enlightenment which too easily accords with our own priorities. We need to keep the Enlightenment in historical perspective, and to be aware that it belonged in its time and place, in the eighteenth-century European world. In its time and place, moreover, we should recognise its limitations. For the rest of this lecture, I would like to follow up this cautionary note, by re-visiting three questions: first, the relation between the republic of letters and the ‘public sphere’; second, the content of Enlightenment thought, and the shift of focus within it that I believe occurred around 1740; third and finally, the relation between

(13) See the special issue of *European Review of History*, 13 (2006): *Enlightenment and Communication: Regional Experiences and Global Consequences*, ed. László Kontler. But the ‘peripheries’ have struck back in the volume edited by R. Butterwick, S. Davies and G. Sánchez Espinosa, *Peripheries of the Enlightenment, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (2008:1).

(14) Dena GOODMAN, *The Republic of Letters: a Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London, 1994); Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (London, 2005).

content and contexts – the viability, or applicability, of Enlightenment thought in certain of the contexts in which it was articulated. Each of these questions carries implications for the phases and settings of Enlightenment. Though I believe the Enlightenment had unity and coherence as an intellectual movement, there were several phases to its development; these were differently experienced in the many parts of the European world. I shall now address briefly each of the questions and their implications, and to do so I shall draw on evidence with which I am most familiar. The Enlightenment in Naples will therefore figure prominently, as, to a lesser extent, will that in Scotland. Areas about which I know relatively little, such as Germany, will rarely be mentioned, while the many other expert contributions to this volume will enable readers to judge the extent to which my remarks may be applicable to the case of Enlightenment in Spain.

My first question is: how should we understand the relation between the ‘republic of letters’ and the ‘public sphere’ in the Enlightenment? Some scholars distinguish sharply between the two; others assimilate them, as one and the same phenomenon. Most scholars, however, have assumed that while the republic of letters and the public sphere can refer to different things, there must have been some relationship between them, and that the presence of one implies the existence of the other. Yet the republic of letters and the ‘public sphere’ are both historically and historiographically distinct. The ‘public sphere’, as we have seen, is an historian’s – or, strictly, a philosopher’s – construction, projected onto certain features of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century society. By contrast, the republic of letters, as a term and an entity, was in existence in the fifteenth century. The *respublica literaria* was a self-conscious network of scholars linked by correspondence, personal travel, and, from the late fifteenth century, by the use of print; crucially, these made it possible for such a network to exist outside the structures of the church¹⁵. Both as an ideal and in practice the republic of letters

(15) Françoise WAQUET, ‘Qu’est-ce que la République des Lettres? Essai de sémantique historique’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes*, 147 (1989), pp. 473-502.

survived the strains of Reform and Counter-Reform; by the seventeenth century its connexions underpinned the intellectual life of Europe.

There is no denying that the republic of letters entered a new phase of its existence at the end of the seventeenth century. The spread of academies and scientific societies brought a new level of co-ordination to scholarly correspondence, making it less reliant on personal connection, while the advent of the review journals made access to the content of new books far easier. The republic of letters never became impersonal: an etiquette of introductions and of the exchange of books and antiquities continued to govern relations between individual men of letters – even if the code of behaviour was sometimes observed in the breach¹⁶. Correspondence remained vital as a mark of recognition, especially for those at a distance from recognised institutions of learning. But the range of readers, scholars and other men and women of letters with access to the republic had broadened and deepened a great deal by 1740.

Behind many of these initiatives was the Huguenot diaspora, headed by Pierre Bayle and Jean Le Clerc: Bayle's *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (1684-87) and Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque Universelle* (1686-93) respectively set the standard in publicising and discussing new work. Subsequently Le Clerc directed two more, similar review journals, the *Bibliothèque choisie* (1703-13) and the *Bibliothèque Ancienne et Moderne* (1714-26), while the *Nouvelles* was revived and continued by another Huguenot, Jacques Bernard. These had several imitators, in other vernaculars as well as French¹⁷. The Huguenots undoubtedly had a religious and political agenda – indeed several agenda, since they disagreed sharply among themselves. In different ways they sought a renewal of the Grotian and Socinian commitment to religious toleration; many of them also supported William III's efforts to construct a coalition against the apparently aggressive, Catholicising ambitions of Louis XIV, though all were determined that this should not lead to a new war of religion¹⁸.

(16) Anne GOLDGAR, *Impolite Learning. Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters 1680-1750* (New Haven and London, 1995).

(17) ISRAEL, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 142-55.

(18) John MARSHALL, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), Part 3: 'The "Early Enlightenment" defence of toleration and the "republic of letters" in the 1680s and 1690s'.

Despite – or because of – this agenda, the Huguenot republic of letters was not confessionally defined. Its primary achievement was to make the republic of letters francophone as well as Latin-speaking, thus enhancing its reach and flexibility. All those with access to the Huguenot journals and their imitators could be far better and more quickly informed of developments within the world of letters and scholarship than ever before. Not everywhere took advantage: for example, Scotland remained largely cut off, despite its Protestantism and its connections with the Netherlands. But where someone took the initiative in correspondence and acquiring the journals, the effect could be galvanising. It was access to the republic of letters and French intellectual culture which energised intellectual life in Catholic Naples in the late seventeenth century, when both Pietro Giannone and Giambattista Vico received their formation¹⁹.

Even this expanded republic of letters, however, was still for the benefit of its members, rather than a wider ‘public’. In so far as Bayle and Le Clerc sought a wider audience, it was the same one as Erasmus and Grotius had addressed: the rarefied world of rulers and their advisers. For the Huguenot diaspora, the over-riding priority was to check the ambition of Louis XIV without plunging Europe into a new war of religion; it was not to construct ‘public spheres’ within the several nations to which they were exiled. In other words, we should not treat the republic of letters as synonymous with a public sphere. At least until the middle decades of the eighteenth century, philosophers and scholars regarded the republic of letters as a means of furthering communication among themselves, and, when opportunity arose, as a platform for influencing rulers and their advisers. They extended the reach of the printed word; but correspondence remained essential to the definition of the republic, to the exclusion of non-members, other than those deemed sympathetic within the ruling elite²⁰.

(19) For this contrast, Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, Ch 3: The intellectual worlds of Naples and Scotland 1680-c. 1725.

(20) An exemplary study of the significance of correspondence for a minor figure in the republic is: Laurence BROCKLISS, *Calvet's Web. Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in eighteenth-century France* (Oxford, 2002)

The same period in which the republic of letters was so prominent, from the 1670s to the 1730s, was also, of course, the period which Jonathan Israel, preceded by Margaret Jacob and several Italian scholars, has identified with the ‘Radical Enlightenment’²¹. This was clearly more than a coincidence. The philosophy of Spinoza was disseminated along the correspondence networks of the republic, while Bayle used his journal, and later his great *Dictionnaire*, to promote discussion of a range of issues – theological, philosophical and historical – through which he could question orthodoxy and attack intolerance. I see no objection to characterising this as a ‘radical’ Enlightenment, as long as it is not treated as exclusively Spinozist. If the Radical Enlightenment was supported by the republic of letters, however, it made little appeal to a more general ‘public’. Its Spinozist wing was largely clandestine, and therefore by definition not public, while Bayle’s inexhaustible armoury of sceptical arguments was trained on fellow-philosophers, theologians and scholars.

If there was an exception, it was England in the first three decades of the eighteenth century. As Habermas realised, when he relied almost entirely on English evidence to support his argument, it is plausible to identify a ‘public sphere’ of independent literary and political debate in England after (and even before) 1700. The formal restrictions on publishing had fallen away in the 1690s, and politicians not only ceased to fear but now vigorously encouraged and subsidised party controversy²². Taking advantage, William Whiston, John Toland, Matthew Tindal and others openly published and discussed radical, heterodox and even irreligious ideas in front of the reading public²³. But this degree of freedom was unusual. Everywhere else, except in the Netherlands, the freedom to publish was restricted. John Toland’s wider strategy reflected this.

(21) Margaret JACOB, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London, 1981). Giuseppe RICUPERATI, *Frontiere e limiti della ragione. Dalla crisi della coscienza europea all’Illuminismo* (Milan, 2006).

(22) J. P. KENYON, *Revolution Principles: the Politics of Party 1689-1720* (Cambridge, 1977); J. A. DOWNIE, *Robert Harley and the Press. Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, 1979).

(23) Maurice WILES, *Archetypal Heresy. Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford, 1996), Ch. 4: ‘The rise and fall of British Arianism’; Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken* (Cambridge, 1992).

He did not rely on print alone, but engaged in correspondence to reach those in power. Thus this radical, Spinozist and republican philosopher corresponded directly with the Electress Sophia of Hanover, heir-designate to the British thrones, and with her daughter, Sophie Charlotte, Queen of Prussia²⁴.

In any case, radical Enlightenment was brought to an abrupt end virtually everywhere in Europe (including the British Isles) in the 1730s. Effectively, it was ‘closed down’ by religious and civil authorities. In the Catholic world, the fate of Giannone between 1734 and his death in 1748 was emblematic: hoping to return from exile in Vienna to Naples, he was arrested in Venice, pursued across Italy by Papal agents, lured away from the safety of Geneva and kidnapped on behalf of the Duke of Savoy, and then imprisoned by Savoy as a hostage to Rome. His case was a clear demonstration that the Church had the authority and the influence required to suppress heterodoxy²⁵. But a similar clamp-down occurred in the Protestant world, not least in the United Kingdom. As early as 1723 Bernard Mandeville was formally presented by a Grand Jury on charges which included denial of the doctrines of the Trinity and Divine Providence²⁶. A few years later the exiled Piedmontese radical Alberto Radicati was hounded out of England by the Bishop of London; taking refuge in Holland, he found himself little more welcome there. In Scotland John Simson was obliged to stop teaching at Glasgow on suspicion of Arianism, while David Hume would be denied a university appointment for his manifest unbelief²⁷. There

(24) Justin CHAMPION, *Republican Learning. John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture 1696-1722* (Manchester, 2003), esp. Ch 5 ‘*Anglia libera: Protestant liberties and the Hanoverian Succession 1700-1714*’.

(25) Pietro GIANNONE, *Vita scritta da lui medesimo*, in S. Bertelli and G. Ricuperati (eds), *Opere di Pietro Giannone* (Milan and Naples, 1971), cap. 9-11.

(26) Bernard MANDEVILLE, *A Vindication of the Book, from the Aspersions contain'd in a Presentment of the Grand Jury of Middlesex* (1723), published with the Third Edition of *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (London, 1723), modern edition by F. B. Kaye, two volumes, (Oxford, 1924; reprinted by the Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1988).

(27) Franco VENTURI, *Saggi sull'Europa illuminista I. Alberto Radicati di Passerano* (Turin, 1954), cap. iv ‘L'esilio in Inghilterra e in Olanda’; Anne SKOCZYLAŚ,

were similar cases in the United Provinces, and in Germany. In other words, nowhere in Europe was there a public sphere which permitted open criticism of Christian orthodoxy, and the republic of letters was no match for the power of church and state when these determined to silence heterodoxy. By 1740 – I agree with Israel on this – the Radical Enlightenment was over: a new intellectual strategy for bettering the human condition, combined with a new approach to the public, was needed if Enlightenment was to survive and continue.

This brings me to my second question: what was the intellectual content of Enlightenment after 1740? During the mid and later eighteenth century the range of interests displayed by those who thought of themselves as belonging to the intellectual movement of Enlightenment was too broad for a strict definition of its intellectual content. To concede this, however, is not to say that the Enlightenment lacked intellectual coherence. What can be identified in the 1740s, I suggest, is a new focus on human life in this world, and on the prerequisites for its betterment, irrespective of whether or not there was a world to come. Given the new focus on this world, and on the prospects for improving the human condition, certain subjects now received more concentrated attention, and stimulated the most original reflection. Two of the most important of these were history and political economy.

It was perhaps in the writing of history that the consequences of abandoning a direct confrontation with the sacred were most complex, and the eventual outcome among the most original of all the intellectual achievements associated with the Enlightenment. I have already referred to the fate of Giannone. In 1723 he had published the *Storia civile del regno di Napoli* in Naples – and was promptly hounded out of the city, into exile in Vienna. Leaving Vienna in 1734, he was

Mr Simson's Knotty Case. Divinity, Politics, and Due Process in early Eighteenth-Century Scotland (Montreal, 2001); M. A. STEWART, *The Kirk and the Infidel* (Lancaster, 1995), for an account of the successful opposition to the appointment of Hume to the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh in 1745.

hounded again, as we have seen, for fear that he would re-publish his history. The offending work had been a ‘civil history’ in two senses. It had reconstructed the history of the kingdom juridically, in terms of the laws by which successive rulers had sought to impose their authority; simultaneously, it had presented that history as a constant struggle against the pretensions of the Church in Rome, which claimed both feudal and ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Naples²⁸. As a ‘civil history’, in other words, Giannone’s work was both constitutional and anti-clerical. Much as Rome tried, however, it did not succeed in suppressing either the work or the concept of ‘civil history’. The *Storia civile* was soon translated, first, in curious circumstances, into English in 1729-31, then, much more influentially, into French in 1742²⁹. A new Italian edition followed in 1753, another in 1766, and two more in Naples itself in 1770 and 1792.

What was successfully suppressed, however, was Giannone’s second history, ‘Il Triregno’, written between 1731 and 1733, in the final years of his exile in Vienna. This time the manuscript fell into the hands of the Church before publication, and was conveyed to the Vatican for safekeeping. (A full version would not be published until 1940.)³⁰ Written in three parts, ‘Del regno terreno’, ‘Del regno celeste’, and ‘Del regno papale’, ‘Il Triregno’ reconstructed the history contained in the Old and New Testaments as a history of human sociability. To write it, Giannone had to engage with a literature considerably more heterodox than that which had inspired the *Storia civile*; he read La Peyrère, Hobbes, Spinoza, Le Clerc, Bayle and Toland, as well

(28) Pietro GIANNONE, *Dell’Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli*, 4 vols, (Naples, 1723); see Giannone’s ‘Introduzione’ to Vol. I for an outline of his intentions.

(29) On the English translation: Hugh TREVOR-ROPER, ‘Pietro Giannone and Great Britain’, *Historical Journal* 39 (1996) pp. 657-75; on the French translation, Georges Bonnant, ‘Pietro Giannone à Genève et la publication de ses oeuvres en Suisse au XVIII et XIXe siècles’, *Annali della Scuola speciale per archivisti e bibliotecari dell’università di Roma*, 3.1-2 (1963) pp. 119-29.

(30) Pietro GIANNONE, *Il Triregno*, ed. Alfredo Parente, 3 vols (Bari, 1940). This edition was based on a manuscript copy of the work in Naples. It is now clear that other manuscripts, including that held in the Vatican, contain additional, still unpublished material.

as the new biblical scholarship of the seventeenth century, including Bochart, Grotius, and Huet³¹. In other words, Giannone's response to the attempted suppression of his civil history was to move onto the even more contested ground of sacred history. But instead of making sacred history serve its usual purpose of justifying the origins and beliefs of the rival Christian churches and confessions, he treated it as a privileged site for the investigation of the post-Hobbesian problem of human sociability, and in particular of how religion had fostered social relations among the earliest groups of humans. He thus turned sacred history into a window on human life in this world. A critical, philosophically-informed rewriting of its subject matter, the 'Triregno' was a lost masterpiece of radical Enlightenment.

Nor was it the only work of the 1720s and 1730s to engage with the sacred in human history which would be lost to the later Enlightenment. Another which, if not suppressed, nevertheless fell into oblivion, was Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (of which three editions were published, in 1725, 1730, and 1744)³². Vico's argument was not, like Giannone's, unorthodox in its implication, even if it obviously side-stepped the known problems of sacred history, such as the composition of the Pentateuch; Vico was not persecuted, and the *Scienza Nuova* was not suppressed. But Vico's extraordinarily imaginative exploration of the role of divine providence in human affairs was no more able to survive in the new intellectual climate after 1740 than Giannone's re-writing of sacred history. From the 1750s, Enlightenment historical writing would take different directions.

One of these involved development of the idea of 'civil history'. This was effectively the conception of history adopted by the Scottish historians David Hume and William Robertson, in their respective histories of *England* (1754-61) and of *Scotland* (1759). Though neither was a jurist, both wrote histories of nations as shaped by the develop-

(31) Lia MANNARINO, *Le mille favole degli antichi. Ebraismo e cultura europea nel pensiero religioso di Pietro Giannone* (Florence, 1999); Giuseppe RICUPERATI, *L'esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone* (Milan and Naples, 1970).

(32) Giambattista VICO, *Scienza Nuova, Prima* (1725) and *Terza* (1744), both in Andrea Battistini (ed), *Giambattista Vico Opere*, 2 vols, (Milan, 1990).

ment of their constitutions (or, in the Scottish case, by the persistent weakness of its constitution); both also placed the relation between the church and the civil magistrate at the centre of their narratives, particularly so after the Reformation. Of the two, Hume was the more radical, being unafraid to prick English pride by commenting on the imperfections of the ancient constitution, or, more seriously, by exposing the deadly consequences of the puritan clergy's claims to speak for the holy spirit.³³ But even Hume's conception of civil history involved no direct confrontation with sacred history. Neither historian ran the slightest danger of having their work suppressed. Robertson's Presbyterian 'Moderatism' worried the Calvinist ultra-orthodox in Scotland, while Hume was known to be an infidel; but this did nothing to impede their works from reaching the public. Once Hume had accepted that he must publish in London to be distributed in England, the *History of England* sold handsomely throughout Britain, while Robertson's *Scotland*, unexpectedly successful in its own right, was the spring-board for an even more lucrative career as a historian³⁴.

Exceptionally, one British historian took the further step of engaging with sacred history, Edward Gibbon. Looking back in his memoirs, Gibbon characterised the 'Civil History of Naples' as one of three books which 'may have remotely contributed to forming the historian of the Roman empire'³⁵. But it was not civil history which enabled him to write the notorious chapter xv of the *Decline and Fall*, 'Of the progress of the Christian Religion, and the Sentiments, Manners, Numbers and Condition of the Primitive Christians'³⁶. Gibbon was unable to read the 'Triregno', so he had to read the same works as

(33) Colin KIDD, *Subverting Scotland's Past. Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689-c. 1830* (Cambridge, 1993); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion II Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999).

(34) Richard B. SHER, *The Enlightenment and the Book. Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago and London, 2006), pp. 214, 240-41, 260, 308-9.

(35) John MURRAY (ed), *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* (London, 1896), Memoir B, p. 143.

(36) Edward GIBBON, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, 6 vols in three, (London, 1994), I, pp. 446-513.

Giannone had done before him, including Bayle and Le Clerc, and use them to interpret the classical and early Christian sources. Gibbon did not present himself as a sacred historian. Instead, he claimed to identify the ‘secondary’, human causes of Christianity’s rise and consolidation under a church which constituted itself independently of the civil power, and then pretended to exercise authority over it. Writing in these terms, he suggested, he could step outside sacred history while still engaging with its subject matter. Nevertheless, the *Decline and Fall* gave far more offence to the religious than Hume’s civil *History of England*. To Gibbon’s surprise, but not to Hume’s, there was a storm of protest: even in 1776, an ‘external’ interest in sacred history still gave deep offence to believers³⁷. But, as with Hume’s *History*, to give offence was no bar to reaching the public: the *Decline and Fall* sold even better than the works of the Scots³⁸.

There was another response to the blocking off of sacred history after 1740. Instead of developing a version of Giannone’s original idea of ‘civil history’, this approach had recourse to ‘natural history’. The key contributions were those of Buffon in his multi-volume *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, the first volumes of which appeared in 1749, and Rousseau, in his short, conjectural *Discours sur l’origine et fondemens de l’inégalité* (1755)³⁹. Together they made it possible to envisage a natural history of human kind from the earliest appearance of man on earth. In this perspective sacred history was not so much circumvented as reduced, set amidst longer and more extensive patterns of natural and human development, which themselves were punctuated by catastrophes. An obvious field in which to apply these

(37) David HUME to Edward GIBBON, 18 March 1776, in J. Y. T. Greig (ed), *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1932), II, pp. 309-11. David Womersley, ‘Gibbon and the “Watchmen of the Holy City”’: revision and religion in the *Decline and Fall*’, in R. McKitterick and R. Quinault (eds), *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 190-216. The forthcoming Volume V of Pocock’s *Barbarism and Religion* will contain a major new examination of Ch xv of the *Decline and Fall*.

(38) SHER, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p. 252, note 142, and p. 259, n. 161.

(39) On BUFFON, Peter HANNS REILL, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 2005), Ch.1; on Rousseau as exponent and critic of Buffonian natural history: Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 172-81.

insights was the New World: Robertson's *History of America* (1778), Raynal's collaborative *Histoire des Deux Indes* (1780), Clavigero's *Storia antica del Messico* (1780) – each sought to write the history of the encounter between Europeans and native peoples in a way which made the natural the starting point of the civil⁴⁰. Another response to the inspiration of natural history was 'conjectural' history, exemplified by Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), and later in Francesco Mario Pagano's *Saggi politici* (1783-5, 1791-2). Pagano's remarkable work, which sought to retrieve and combine the insights of his Neapolitan predecessor Giambattista Vico with those of the French natural historians, was probably the most original of its kind: noticeably, however, his recourse to Vico dispensed with any role for providence in the course of human history⁴¹.

I have discussed the example of historical writing both because it illustrates the Enlightenment's capacity for original thought, as its protagonists focused on human affairs in this world, and because it underlines the need to be alert to changes in the content of Enlightenment interests. After 1740, it seems, the interests of the earlier, radical Enlightenment were either repressed or fell away, to be replaced by others which offered a less direct challenge to orthodoxy. Only Gibbon sought to resume and go beyond the enterprise which Giannone had been forced to leave off by the seizure of his 'Triregno', writing a secular history of the sacred. But this does not mean that orthodoxy had won. If most Enlightenment historians ceased to engage directly with the sacred, they were able to articulate other conceptions of history, 'civil' and 'natural', which, by ignoring the sacred, may have diminished it no less effectively. As their sales figures demonstrated, moreover, these historians reached a public far greater than any imagined by the proponents of radical Enlightenment.

(40) Stewart J. BROWN (ed), *William Robertson and the expansion of empire* (Cambridge, 1997); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion IV Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge, 2005).

(41) Francesco MARIO PAGANO, *Saggi politici*, 2 vols (Naples, 1783-5), 2nd edition (Naples, 1791-2), ed Luigi and Laura Salvetti Firpo (Naples, 1993).

The evidence for a new concern with betterment in this world during the 1740s and 1750s is even clearer in the case of political economy. There is no need to rehearse the details of its emergence here: Jesús Astigarraga has made the subject his own⁴². The point which I would emphasise in the context of this lecture is the connection between the turn to political economy and the construction of an Enlightenment ‘public sphere’. As Hume, Robertson and Gibbon discovered, well-written history sold well: it appealed to a public broader than existing members of the republic of letters. But Enlightenment political economy was written, not simply in the hope that such a public existed, but with the positive intention of creating one.

This was the objective of Vincent de Gournay and his circle in mid-century France, as they translated and amplified works of English political economy to publish alongside their own⁴³. In Naples, the *Essai politique sur le commerce* (1734, 1736), by Jean-François Melon, had already aroused similar expectations among intellectual reformers: quite apart from its analytical relevance to the Neapolitan predicament, it had set an example simply by being published. The example was followed by Antonio Genovesi, whose admiration for Melon and Gournay led him to embark on a series of translations. His major project was a translation into Italian of Gournay’s French translation of the Englishman John Cary’s *Essay on the State of England* (1695), which became the *Storia del commercio della Gran Bretagna* (1757-8). With this Genovesi hoped to educate ‘the enlightened youth’ of the kingdom in the ‘science of commerce and the economy’. In Scotland, by contrast, economic matters had been a subject of public discussion since the 1690s. But David Hume clearly believed that the level of economic understanding was still too low: his *Political Discourses* (1752) were intended to educate his fellow-countrymen in the pre-requisites of economic improvement⁴⁴. A similar aspiration informed the initiative of the Conde de Peñaflorida in founding the Real Sociedad

(42) Jesús ASTIGARRAGA, *Los Ilustrados Vascos. Ideas, instituciones y reformas económicas en España* (Barcelona, 2003).

(43) Robin IVES, ‘Political economy and political publicity in eighteenth-century France’, *French History*, 17 (2003), pp. 1-18.

(44) ROBERTSON, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 340-2, 350-60, 371-6.

Bascongada, even if the suspicions of the Church meant that freedom to publish works of political economy, including those of Genovesi, was slower to be achieved⁴⁵.

To create a ‘public sphere’ in this way was, in effect, to create a context. That context might be local, regional or national; it would almost certainly correspond with some political boundary, and it would be limited by language. But as articulated in political economy, Enlightenment was inconceivable without specific contexts: it could not be purely cosmopolitan, or transnational, and it had to reach out beyond the membership of the republic of letters. Turning to political economy therefore leads directly to my third question: how should we approach, and assess, the relation between the content of Enlightenment thought and the contexts, the settings, in which it was applied? Precisely because it aspires to be a universal discourse, whose principles should be generally applicable, political economy raises this question in a particularly acute form. In the case of Enlightenment political economy, answers to the question have tended to follow three lines. The obvious first line of investigation is the reception of economic ideas in a given context. Early studies of such reception tended to be straightforward: historians noticed that writers in ‘receiving’ countries read English writers on trade and the Physiocrats on agriculture (the Physiocrats often doing duty for all French economic writing, regardless of whether the authors were members of the Physiocratic circle). More sophisticated studies of reception are now beginning to emerge, showing how complex was the process by which, for example, Cary’s *Essay on the State of England* was translated, first into French, then into Italian, more than fifty years later⁴⁶.

A second line of enquiry into the impact of political economy has focussed on its institutionalisation in specific national and regional con-

(45) ASTIGARRAGA, *Los Ilustrados Vascos*; and J. ASTIGARRAGA and J. USOZ, ‘From the Neapolitan A. Genovesi of Carlo di Borbone to the Spanish A. Genovesi of Carlos III: V. de Villava’s Spanish translation of *Lezioni di Commercio*’, in B. Jossa, R. Patalano and E. Zagari (eds), *Genovesi economista* (Naples, 2007), pp. 193-220.

(46) Sophus REINERT, ‘Blaming the Medici: footnotes, falsification, and the fate of the “English model” in eighteenth-century Italy’, *History of European Ideas*, 32 (2006), special issue on ‘Commerce and Morality in Eighteenth-Century Italy’, pp. 430-55.

texts. One aspect of this process was the creation of university chairs in the subject, beginning with Antonio Genovesi's chair in 'commerce and mechanics' in Naples in 1754. Another was the foundation of academies and societies to debate the new ideas and spread knowledge of technical innovations. The inauguration of Real Sociedad Bascongada in 1765 was a notable example; it had been preceded by the Select Society of Edinburgh, founded in 1754, and would be followed by many others, the length and breadth of Europe. Institutionalisation was often accompanied by a systematic attempt to survey economic conditions in the region: Giuseppe Galanti's revelatory surveys of the poverty of the provinces in the kingdom of Naples exemplified the need for such enquiries.

Finally, historians have studied the persistent attempts of the adherents of political economy to have their ideas put into practice, by persuading ministers to adopt policies based on a better understanding of economic principles and the actual conditions of the country. On several occasions, in France in the 1770s, in Naples in the 1780s, in the Spain of Campomanes, economists even found themselves in government. Even then, however, the story tends to be one of failure – of good intentions frustrated. We should not be negative about this, however, for to do so simply concedes ground to those of our colleagues who have no interest in ideas and waste no opportunity to discount their importance in history. It was of the utmost importance to the Enlightenment that political economy was 'embedded' in particular local contexts – whether in Scotland or in Naples, in France or Germany, in Spain or in the Basque country; and the history of this 'embedding' of political economy in local contexts is a vital area of Enlightenment scholarship. Moreover it is arguable that the dissemination of new economic ideas among the educated was more important than direct influence over government ministers. For it was precisely this which created a 'public sphere', an autonomous forum for the discussion of ideas, which would gradually generate an independent 'public opinion'. It was by educating public opinion that economists such as Genovesi and Hume would also educate governments: what ministers needed to understand was that the economic process was the result of the inter-action of myriad individuals following their interest, and that the best economic policy was one which facilitated that interaction, rather than directing it from above.

But the danger of concentrating on the failure of governments to implement the economists' proposals for reform is not only that it undervalues the economists' real achievement. It may also put too much weight on their good intentions. That is, it may lead us to take their arguments for granted, and neglect to assess their coherence, their analytical cogency, and their appropriateness to the circumstances they addressed. This danger has been brought sharply into focus by the recent, powerful study by Istvan Hont of *Jealousy of Trade*⁴⁷. The phrase 'Jealousy of Trade' is taken from David Hume's essay of that title (though it was used earlier by the Neapolitan Paolo Mattia Doria); Hont argues that it captures the central issue of eighteenth-century political economy – how do nations prosper in a world of competitive commerce? In Hont's view, the viable answers were not those of *doux commerce* – the belief that commerce would itself soften national rivalry – or those which assumed that the advantage of low costs would shift from one country to another, equalising economic prospects over the long run. On the contrary, Hont suggests, Melon, Hume and Adam Smith were right to argue that technological innovation and the division of labour would give richer countries a permanent advantage over poorer ones. 'Poor countries' could never expect to 'catch up': the best they could do was follow the example of richer ones. The strong implication of Hont's discussion, therefore, is that there was no viable alternative to the 'tough love' arguments of Hume and Smith; those who pursued alternative strategies were misguided, even in their own time.

The case of Naples makes it possible to offer a partial response to Hont's argument. For when Neapolitans discovered the work of Melon, in the late 1730s, they believed that they had found an economist who addressed the characteristic circumstances of their own kingdom. Naples, it was assumed, was an agricultural country, blessed with natural fertility: it need only exploit this endowment. What Melon pointed out was the danger facing such a country: that a natural abundance of grain was a disincentive to producers, because it lowered

(47) Istvan HONT, *Jealousy of Trade. International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass, and London, 2005): see especially pp. 1-156: 'An Introduction'.

prices. Without incentives to produce, a bad harvest could quickly turn abundance into famine. To this danger Melon offered clear remedies. First, an agricultural country should permit the free export of grain. It should also encourage the development of manufactures, including luxury manufactures, as an incentive to agricultural producers; Melon was keen on mechanisation and specialisation, and dismissive of critics of luxury. He envisaged an agricultural economy as maintaining a 'balance', both internally and externally. Internally there should be a balance between the countryside and the capital city: 16 in 20 of the inhabitants of France, Melon thought, were agriculturalists, and he took this to be exemplary. Melon also advocated a balance between liberty and protection in foreign trade, not to achieve a 'balance of trade' as such, but to protect manufactures which added value to domestic primary goods⁴⁸.

In his essay 'Of Commerce', David Hume had glimpsed the possibility that agricultural nations – he mentioned France, Italy and Spain – might follow a different pattern of development from commercial nations. But he did so only to dismiss such an argument as mistaken. He expressly denied Melon's calculation of the distribution of the population in France, substituting for it an even more fanciful one of his own, that 'in most parts of Europe' half of the inhabitants lived in cities⁴⁹. By its very abruptness, however, Hume's dismissal of Melon was also an acknowledgment of the direction in which the Frenchman's argument might be taken. This was precisely the direction in which the Neapolitan economists, led by Genovesi, proceeded to go. They believed that they had good reasons to adopt Melon's diagnosis of the predicament of agricultural nations, and to advocate the remedies he proposed: freedom to export grain, encouragement of manufactures by tolerance of a degree of luxury, and a cutting back of the proportion of the kingdom's wealth and population concentrated in the capital city, to ensure a better 'balance' between the city and the rest of the kingdom. These were to be the guiding principles of

(48) ROBERTSON, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 342-5; cf Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, pp. 30-34.

(49) ROBERTSON, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 363-71.

almost all Neapolitan political economy for the rest of the eighteenth century. Commitment to them was reinforced by two translations of Melon's *Essai politique sur le commerce*, in 1778 and 1795, although after Genovesi's death (in 1769) the Neapolitans also supplemented their reading with Georg Ludwig Schmid d'Avenstein's *Principes de la législation universelle* (1776, translated 1777). Schmid's work offered a congenial compendium of Physiocratic principles, with modifications which brought those principles into line with existing Neapolitan convictions⁵⁰.

To allow that the Neapolitans had good reasons to adopt the analysis of Melon is, however, to offer no more than a partial response to the challenge offered by Istvan Hont. If we turn to the part played by political economy in the assault on the 'feudal system' in the kingdom of Naples, certain limitations of economic analysis become apparent⁵¹. The assault on feudalism was instigated by Genovesi's pupil, Galanti, in the 1770s, and was moved to the head of the Neapolitan Enlightenment agenda by Gaetano Filangieri in the 1780s. The charge was that the consolidation of the feudal system had resulted in a concentration of power over the land in the hands of a tiny number of barons who, along with the Church, tyrannised the inhabitants of the countryside. The remedy lay in the recovery and sale of feudal rights as private property in land, and the division of land into smaller holdings, for distribution to the peasantry. The example of the English 'farmer' and the French 'fermier' showed, it was argued, that small to medium-scale landholding resulted in the best cultivation. As matters stood in the kingdom of

(50) J.-F. MELON, *Saggio politico sul commercio, tradotto dal francese colle annotazioni dell'Abate Longano*, 2 vols, (Naples, 1778); and *Saggio politico sul commercio del Signor Melon. Tradotto dal francese. Nuova edizione con note* (Naples, 1795). G.-L. Schmid d'Avenstein, *Principii della legislazione universale del Sign. Schmidt. Traduzione dal francese*, 4 vols (Naples, 1791); on Schmid, Vieri Becagli, 'Georg-Ludwig Schmid d'Avenstein e i suoi *Principes de la législation universelle*: oltre la fisiocrazia', *Studi settecenteschi*, 24 (2004), pp. 215-52.

(51) For a fuller statement of the following argument, see my 'Political economy and the "feudal system" in Enlightenment Naples: outline of a problem', in R. BUTTERWICK, S. DAVIES, and G. SÁNCHEZ ESPINOSA, *Peripheries of the Enlightenment*, in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth century* (2008:1), pp. 65-86.

Naples, however, ‘la gran macchina de’ feudi’ obstructed every reform which the economists wished to see implemented⁵².

The problem with this polemic, as at least one contemporary, Giuseppe Palmieri, pointed out, was that it was based on poor economics. The critics of feudalism were confusing issues of ownership and scale of landholding, and were misapplying the examples of England and France. The Neapolitan peasantry, Palmieri observed, did not have the capital available to English farmers or (at least on the Physiocratic model) to French *fermiers*. It was even more doubtful whether the concept of property in land, whose acceptance was the prerequisite of replacing the feudal system, was sufficiently understood in the kingdom. (Much of the land which was not subject to feudal jurisdiction or in the hands of the church belonged to the communities, or Università.) In short, the critique of feudalism rested on ill-digested principles and inappropriate examples, whose applicability to Neapolitan circumstances was open to serious question⁵³.

Moreover, the economists’ appeal to public opinion had little effect on those in government. Filangieri was the most eloquent in conceptualising the role of ‘public opinion’. Informed by a free press, public opinion was the ‘tribunal’ by whose suffrage alone rulers should govern⁵⁴. But the priorities of the monarchy and of its ministers and jurists were different from those of the economists. They too sought to recover feudal rights, but then either to retain or to re-sell them for the crown’s benefit – not to convert them into private property, as the

(52) Giuseppe Maria Galanti, *Descrizione del contado di Molise, con un saggio storico sulla costituzione del Regno*, 2 vols (Naples, 1781), Vol. I, chapters 4-9; Gaetano FILANGIERI, *Scienza della legislazione* (1780-85), in the recent edition by Vincenzo Ferrone and others, 7 vols, (Venice, 2003-4), esp. Vol II ‘Delle leggi politiche ed economiche’, pp. 23-55, and Vol III, ‘Delle leggi criminali, parte prima’, pp. 159-84.

(53) Among several, over-lapping works published by Palmieri between 1787 and 1792, see *Riflessioni sulla pubblica felicità relativamente al regno di Napoli* (Naples, 1787, 1788), pp. 80-104, and *Pensieri economici relativi al regno di Napoli* (Naples, 1789), pp. 120-40.

(54) FILANGIERI, *Scienza della legislazione*, Vol V, pp. 359-65: cap. liii: ‘Della libertà della stampa’.

economists hoped⁵⁵. In the face of a monarchy belatedly determined to rebuild its finances and assert its governing authority, the economists and philosophers of the late Neapolitan Enlightenment discovered that it was not enough to have created a ‘public sphere’. Public opinion was not, after all, so effective as a means of influencing governments and teaching them to limit their intervention in economic affairs.

The point of drawing attention to the Neapolitan debate is not to diminish the justice of the attack on feudalism – it was a pernicious system of power and exploitation, which crippled the economy of the kingdom and denied the majority of its inhabitants any prospect of a better life on this earth. It was everything the Enlightenment stood against. But we should not take it for granted that the arguments deployed against feudalism were always the best available, or even that Enlightenment political economy, which presupposed the concept of property right, was ever fully equal to the challenge which feudalism presented.

As historians, we must set the Enlightenment in its contexts, for only by such research will we be able to gauge the extent to which Enlightenment thought was embedded in society, and do justice to its intellectual achievements. But we should also keep our critical wits about us, and not simply indulge in celebration of Enlightenment ideas. Enlightenment was indeed a good cause – a necessary cause, I would argue, for countries such as Scotland, Naples, and Spain, if they were to develop their economies and modernise their societies. But this is no reason for historians to overlook its limitations, whether in its expectations of the public and ‘public opinion’, or in the content of its thought.

(55) On this conflict of interest, Anna-Maria RAO, *L'amaro della feudalità: la devoluzione di Arnone e la questione feudale a Napoli alla fine del '700* (Naples, 1984); on the ambitions of the Neapolitan monarchy in the 1780s, John A. Davis, *Naples and Napoleon. Southern Italy and the European Revolutions 1780-1860* (Oxford, 2006), part I ‘Absolutist Naples’.