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Review Article

Resacralizing the World: The Fate of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography*

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The earthquake that struck Lisbon in 1755 shook the Enlightenment to its foundations. For Voltaire, the city's destruction did not announce the vengeance of an angry God, as some Christian apologists would have it, but rather the indifference of nature and the limits of human comprehension. "God alone is right," he concluded the following year in his *Poème sur la destruction de Lisbonne*. There was no judgment to be passed, neither for or against the divine, nor for or against the world. If human suffering served to dispel the "illusion" that "all is well today," it did not keep the philosophe from embracing the more modest hope that "one day all will be well."¹

It is widely known that Voltaire published these observations, along with *Candide*, in an effort to undermine the bases of optimism as thoroughly as seismic activity had laid waste the capital of Portugal. In rejecting the traditional rationale for providence, Voltaire followed a host of philosophers and theologians who suspected that the world had been created, and effectively abandoned, by a deity whose motives could never be fully known. While Cartesians responded to this possibility by jettisoning traditional cosmologies, Jansenists such as Pascal adopted a more circumspect view: the soul

* The works under review include David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), xiv+304, \$54.50 (cloth), \$21.50 (paper); Alyssa Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xi+341, \$55.00 (cloth); Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xv+314, \$85.00 (cloth), \$29.99 (paper); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), xvi+273, \$49.50 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper); and Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), xiv+397, \$27.00 (paper). I would like to thank Stephanie Frank, Eric Oberle, and the members of Washington University's Eighteenth-Century Interdisciplinary Salon for their comments on and criticisms of earlier versions of this essay.

¹ François-Marie Arouet, Voltaire, *Poème sur la destruction de Lisbonne*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (hereafter *O.C.*), new ed., ed. Louis Moland, 52 vols. (Paris, 1877–85), 9:468.

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must wager on salvation by a deity that is “infinitely incomprehensible,” though doing so provided little solace in this life.² Voltaire chided Pascal for his fatalism and counseled those in the grips of paralyzing spiritual obsessions to praise God “without wanting to penetrate the obscurity of his mysteries.”³ His more radical contemporary, d’Holbach, charged that orthodox claims of God’s omniscience and absence in the face of disaster proved the futility of belief in general. “The doctors of Christianity,” he sneered, “by the attributes used to adore, or rather to disfigure divinity, . . . only succeeded in obliterating it, or at least in rendering it unrecognizable.”⁴

For historians of eighteenth-century Europe, the specter of this hidden God has proven as revealing as it was for Voltaire and his interlocutors. Traditionally, it has been seen to coincide with the decline of religion in the wake of “the disenchantment of the world” (to cite Schiller’s and Weber’s famous phrase).⁵ This review essay will assess recent scholarship, which has produced alternative accounts of how Enlightenment-era theologians, philosophers, and politicians responded to the perceived absence of the divine by endowing worldly institutions and ideals with ever greater, more immediate presence. In contrast to the formerly dominant view, these studies have emphasized the extent to which the origins of secularization should be located within religion itself, rather than in absolute opposition to it. While such an approach has yielded significant insights, it has in turn raised novel questions and given rise to new points of departure. This essay, therefore, has a double agenda. I will first offer a brief survey of the ways in which historians and philosophers have revised the relationship between religion and the Enlightenment before turning to more recent work in the field. In addition, I will review this literature with an eye to framing a new perspective from which to view the dynamics of the secularization process.

The status of religion has long served to distinguish between national variations on the Enlightenment project, and it is now coming to transform historical definitions of the movement as a whole. The contributions of Joachim Whaley and T. C. W. Blanning in the seminal collection *The Enlightenment in National Context*, edited by Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, have described how, in German-speaking territories, Protestant as well as Catholic versions of the Enlightenment enshrined personal piety, ecclesiastical

² Blaise Pascal, *Les pensées*, ed. Francis Kaplan (Paris, 2005), 139.

³ Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, in *O.C.*, 22:37.

⁴ Paul Henri Thiry, baron d’Holbach, *Le Christianisme dévoilé, ou Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne* (London, 1767), 94.

⁵ See Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), 129–56, quote on 155.

reform, and zeal for the public good as mutually reinforcing ends.⁶ Likewise, Anthony La Vopa's work—most recently, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy*—continues to refine our understanding of how shifts in the Lutheran ideal of vocation informed the intellectual culture of eighteenth-century Prussia.⁷ Studies of other prominent figures of the period, such as Thomas Ahnert's work on Thomasius and Toshimasa Yasukata's on Lessing, illustrate in careful detail how theological tendencies shaped attempts to reconcile individual reason with external authority, whether temporal or divine.⁸ Similarly, the essays gathered in the volume *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe*, edited by James Bradley and Dale Van Kley, examine the ways in which Pietists in Germany—along with Jansenists in France, Italy, and Austria and nonconformists in Britain—played a crucial role in furthering “enlightened” ideals of personal freedom and religious toleration in both church and state.⁹

J. G. A. Pocock has argued that the Anglican Establishment participated in a distinctly moderate Enlightenment, “sans philosophes,” with the aim of buttressing social authority and containing religious enthusiasm.¹⁰ This view is indicative of the general perspective shared by historians of Britain, although recent years have witnessed greater attention to the relationship between spiritual and philosophical radicalism as well. Jonathan Clark's *English Society* has perhaps advanced the most strident claims for the overwhelming influence of traditional “political theology” in securing the kingdom's stability, going so far as to argue that the British “ancien régime” lasted until 1832.¹¹ While Clark tends to minimize the impact of nontheological innovations such as social contract theory, a host of intellectual historians, including James Tully and B. W. Young, have endeavored to restore Hobbes, Locke,

⁶ Joachim Whaley, “The Protestant Enlightenment in Germany,” and T. C. W. Blanning, “The Enlightenment in Catholic Germany,” both in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1981), 106–26.

⁷ Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge, 2001).

⁸ Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment: Lessing on Christianity and Reason* (Cambridge, 2002); and Thomas Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment: Faith and the Reform of Learning in the Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Rochester, NY, 2006).

⁹ James E. Bradley and Dale K. Van Kley, eds., *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame, IN, 2001).

¹⁰ See J. G. A. Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,” in *Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley, 1980), 91–111 (quote on 93), and *The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764*, vol. 1 of *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge, 1999), 4–10.

¹¹ J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure, and Political Practice* (Cambridge, 1985), quotes on 199, x.

and other thinkers to their original religious contexts.¹² These works, along with volumes such as *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by Knud Haakonssen, have all pointed out the multiple intersections between religious and political dissent in England, Scotland, and Ireland.¹³ As in the case of Germany, specialists in British history have demonstrated that theological and doctrinal issues remained pressing throughout the eighteenth century—all the more so given the religious plurality that prevailed in these regions.

The return to religion has proven especially dramatic among *dix-huitiémistes*, in part because the antipathy between priest and philosophe was most acute in France. Scholarly consensus has retreated from the views of Paul Hazard, Peter Gay, and Michel Vovelle, all of whom produced magisterial studies highlighting the decline of faith in an age of reason.¹⁴ While scholars such as Bernard Plongeron and Robert Mauzi occasionally drew attention to the affinities between Christian and Enlightenment thought, it was arguably Dale Van Kley who definitively signaled a “religious turn” in the field.¹⁵ His work has shown not only that Catholic theology was alive and well during the century of lights but also that Jansenist-Jesuit debates over the function of grace and the organization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy had as much, if not more, bearing on the disintegration of the French ancien régime and the course of the Revolution as did the *Encyclopédie* or the philosophes who championed its cause.¹⁶ In the wake of these reassessments, Carl Becker’s *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, which Gay curtly dismissed as without foundation, is now drawing new appreciation from historians as a prophetic work.¹⁷ To cite one final case, even Jonathan Israel,

¹² James Tully, “Governing Conduct: Locke on the Reform of Thought and Behavior,” in *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), 179–241; and B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998).

¹³ Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁴ Paul Hazard, *The European Mind*, trans. J. Lewis May (London, 1953); Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York, 1966–69); and Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIII^e siècle: Les attitudes devant la mort d’après les clauses de testaments* (Paris, 1978).

¹⁵ Robert Mauzi, *L’idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée françaises au XVIII^e siècle* (Geneva and Paris, 1979), esp. 12–17 and 180–221; and Bernard Plongeron, *Théologie et politique au siècle des lumières (1770–1820)* (Geneva, 1973). I have adopted the expression “religious turn” from Thomas Albert Howard, “Commentary: A ‘Religious Turn’ in European Historiography?” *Church History* 75, no. 1 (2006): 157–62.

¹⁶ Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven, CT, 1996).

¹⁷ See Darrin M. McMahon, “Happiness and *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-*

who remains perhaps the most outspoken advocate in the Anglophone world for a secular, modernizing, and unified Enlightenment, recognizes essential differences between the movement's "mainline" faction, which proved conciliatory toward theological orthodoxies, and its "radical" variant, proponents of which led the charge toward a democratic and dechristianized society.¹⁸

Scholarly attention to the role of religion has likewise made Enlightenment historiography more open to revised narratives of the secularizing process. While secularization traditionally referred to the collapse of traditional beliefs and forms of observance in the face of modern standards of rational inquiry, it has also come to designate the means by which secular concepts, institutions, and ideals emerged out of, but also within, theological antecedents. This shift in conceptual terrain has not gone unnoticed. For instance, in a recent forum in the *American Historical Review*, Van Kley expresses his preference for the substitute term "laicization" precisely because it does not presume a wane in religious sentiment. Jonathan Sheehan's article in the same issue also expresses dissatisfaction with conventional views of secularization, calling attention to how print media changed the meaning (if not the content) of religious texts and in so doing converted them into a vehicle for Enlightenment.¹⁹

In his commentary on the forum, Dror Wahrman observes that Van Kley's and Sheehan's interventions raise an as yet unanswered question: "What was God doing in the eighteenth century?"²⁰ Put another way, one might ask how, and where, the divine figured within Enlightenment-era conceptual frameworks. If God was regarded as increasingly distant and transcendent, then what of the divine remained immanent in the persons and things of the world? Among my aims in this essay is to formulate a response to such queries. European theologians and philosophers had long been preoccupied with the implications of a *deus absconditus* who had no clear bearing on the world, and contemporary scholars have likewise adopted this figure as the terminus a quo of analysis. A consensus has emerged that the expanding distance between God and creation ultimately detached temporal relations from sacred hierarchies, thus opening up conceptual space for a self-regulating universe and a

Century Philosophers: Carl Becker Revisited," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 5 (2006): 681–86.

¹⁸ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), 11–12.

¹⁹ Dale K. Van Kley, "Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity: The Problem of Dechristianization in the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003): 1081–1104, quote on 1092; and Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003): 1061–80.

²⁰ Dror Wahrman, "God and the Enlightenment," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003): 1060.

self-fashioning individual subject. Secularization, which previously referred to a process of inevitable decline, now more often describes a nonlinear movement originating within religion itself that effectively rendered divine referents unnecessary for ordering the human world.

The studies under review are indicative of the shifts that have occurred in historical scholarship on the secularization process. A common theme emerges in this literature, one that emphasizes the various ways in which the perception of divine absence gave rise to new ideals and institutions, from nationalism to modern conceptions of the self. After surveying a cross-section of recent work in the field, this essay will go on to identify an opposing trajectory by which persons and things in the eighteenth century became *resacralized*, immanent to each other in new ways that turned the disenchanting powers of the human subject upon and against itself. It is my contention that the current scholarly emphasis on the hidden God's transcendence (meant here in the usual sense, as the property of rising above worldly subjects, objects, and values) has obscured the role of immanence (the property of dwelling in worldly subjects, objects, and values) in Enlightenment-era efforts to imagine the autonomy of the terrestrial sphere. It will be necessary, therefore, to sketch the contours of this path not taken and the directions in which it might lead future work on the problem of secularization.

REVEALING THE HIDDEN GOD

As previously noted, the hidden God has emerged as a pivotal concept in revisions of the secularization thesis. This development originated first in philosophical studies, before coming to inform the historiography of eighteenth-century Europe. While the sociologist and literary critic Lucien Goldmann was perhaps the first to popularize the expression in twentieth-century scholarship, philosophers such as Hans Blumenberg, Marcel Gauchet, and Charles Taylor have developed intricate arguments to demonstrate how God's perceived distance from creation established the conditions for modern autonomy.²¹ While all three of these scholars have traced secular categories back to developments within the religious sphere, each has advanced a different view on the precise relationship between these domains. Hans Blumenberg's pioneering work *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966) devoted particular attention to how the secular world arose in response to a crisis in medieval theology. Rejecting the scholastic position that the order of creation somehow revealed God's benevolence toward humankind, nominalists such as William of Ockham insisted that divine will could not be restrained by external standards of reason or

²¹ See Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the "Pensées" of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (New York, 1964).

justice. This absolutist interpretation of God's agency, however, left unanswered questions about how humans could arrive at knowledge of the world and their place in it. The solutions arrived at—by Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes in natural philosophy, and Luther and Calvin in theology—stressed a newly charged sense of human “self-assertion” in and over the created universe.²²

Blumenberg's stance toward traditional narratives of secularization followed closely from his fundamental arguments. Against the claims of Karl Löwith, Leo Strauss, and other commentators, Blumenberg insisted that continuities between theological and political concepts indicate “a mortgage of prescribed questions,” the “answer positions” to which have been filled with an unrelated content that performs a function similar to its theological predecessor. If modernity is characterized by self-assertion, then one cannot understand it merely as “a copy of an original truth that is identified with God.” Rather, Blumenberg maintained, the modern age is truly original, according to the “axiom that the legitimate ownership of ideas can be derived only from their authentic production.”²³

While Blumenberg's work has stressed the need for humans to claim possession of the worldview they have created, Marcel Gauchet's *The Disenchantment of the World* (1985) has taken alienation as its point of departure. The emergence of secular modernity in the West, Gauchet argues, required the sequestering of religion from all other spheres of activity. This move was not the consequence of declining belief or philosophical assaults on theological orthodoxies so much as of transformations within religion itself. Gauchet roots his account in an original religious impulse that reduces all meaning to a preestablished “conceptual framework.” He repeatedly describes the relationship between devotees of the earliest religions and their spiritual origins in terms of “radical dispossession” (*dépossession*), “indebtedness,” and “dependence.” While this dynamic underwent significant shifts, it has never ceased to inform the human symbolic order.²⁴

Gauchet's is a decidedly “political history of religion” that attaches paramount importance to the state. The rise of this “sacral transforming agent” imposed the otherness that once characterized the gods of the first religions on and in society. As a result, the divine appeared ever more remote as an

²² Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 125–226, quote on 138. For a more nuanced account of Blumenberg's thesis, as well as an important corrective to it, see Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC, 2002).

²³ Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 65, 71–72.

²⁴ Marcel Gauchet, *Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge, with a foreword by Charles Taylor (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 3–32, quotes on 23–25.

“organizing principle,” and humans were left in a position to “reappropriate” the world. This theologico-political transformation ushered in a long procession of events culminating in the emergence of Christianity, the religion that functioned as a theological conduit for departing from religion. The final act of Gauchet’s passion play of the sacred unfolds during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the Protestant and Catholic Reformations and the rise of political absolutism; the former enshrined the freedom of the conscience, while the latter completed the process of cleaving the terrestrial from the divine sphere. Ultimately, individuals came to assert themselves in the void left by a transcendent divinity: “God’s greatness, taken to the highest level, puts humans on an equal footing with the mystery of creation and validates their independence as cognitive subjects.” The appearance of the modern individual and the modern state signaled the completion of what Gauchet calls a “revolution in transcendence,” predicated on human reoccupation of the space once entirely controlled by the divine. Nevertheless, the self’s past alienation from its origins was not simply overcome but instead transferred to psychological, social, and political dualities that persist both within and among individual selves. As Gauchet observes, “Leaving religion is not like waking from a dream. We originated in religion, we continue to explain ourselves through it, and always will.”²⁵

Charles Taylor, who wrote the foreword to the English translation of *Disenchantment of the World*, has recently published his own work on the fate of religion, entitled *A Secular Age*. This sweeping study addresses the origins and prospects of what he calls “secularity,” or the “conditions of belief” that allow acceptance of the existence of God to be “one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”²⁶ Like Blumenberg and Gauchet, Taylor does not deny that there has been a decline in religious observance, and he also stresses the extent to which modern individualism arose out of shifts in the theological domain. However, he resists Blumenberg’s claim that modern self-assertion obviates the need for transcendent values as well as Gauchet’s resignation to post-spiritual angst. Rather, Taylor understands these responses to be alternatives that do not exclude the possibility of a return to belief.

In his treatment of the connections between religion and the self, Taylor shares key similarities with his predecessors. For instance, the process of disenchantment plays a crucial role in his narrative. Before the sixteenth century, he argues, unbelief was impossible because humans lived in a thoroughly “enchanted world” of spiritual forces and “charged objects” that possessed an independent power within hierarchically organized human com-

²⁵ Ibid., 23, 33–66, 101–99, quotes on 23, 57–58, 104.

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 3.

munities. Taylor locates the main impetus for disenchantment within Christianity, and especially in its attempts to “make over the whole society to higher standards.” The nominalist revolution, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the rise of the early modern state all contributed to a massive effort at “Reform,” which in turn gave rise to a “buffered” self who adopts an “instrumental stance” toward an impersonal physical universe. While religion continues to orient the lives of many, it has gradually become possible—although not necessary—for masses of individuals in the West to eschew divine referents in framing a place in the world.²⁷ The search for a higher order has become an intensely personal matter—which is to say that transcendence must now start from the self’s immanent standpoint.

For Taylor, then, the emergence of the autonomous individual signals a key moment in the secularizing process. Readers will recognize in this approach certain continuities with Taylor’s other works; his emphasis on “buffered” personhood draws on the “punctual” form of subjectivity that he described in *Sources of the Self*.²⁸ Moreover, Taylor rejects a triumphalist account of secularization, not unlike the stance he adopted toward the history of individualism. Taylor holds that modern secularity leaves in its wake “a mutual fragilization of different religious positions,” thus denying us an uncontested source of existential “fullness,” a condition that he identifies with transcendent goals and ideals. More generally, since Taylor refutes the standard claim that modernity is incompatible with religion, he holds open the possibility that immanent and transcendent perspectives could be brought together in multiple ways, including in a resurgence of personal belief in God.²⁹

While it may be too soon to tell if *A Secular Age* will prove as influential as *Sources of the Self*, historians have for some time now made productive use of the work that informed Taylor’s project—especially that of Gauchet. Of signal importance is David Bell’s *The Cult of the Nation in France*, a history of nationalism that draws explicitly on arguments found in *The Disenchantment of the World*. Central to Bell’s approach is the recognition that the modern French nation “arose simultaneously out of, and in opposition to, Christian systems of belief” as a response to the need “to discern and maintain terrestrial order in the face of God’s absence.” Despite what one might assume by following the arguments of Van Kley and Catherine Maire, Bell is careful to note that nationalism owed little to the Gallican orientation of French Jansenism. This tradition might have contributed to “national sentiment,” a feeling of belonging to a community with a shared past and cultural attributes,

²⁷ Ibid., 20–158, 540–93, quotes on 32, 63, 540–41.

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 143–76, quote on 160.

²⁹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 543–95, 767–72, quotes on 595, 768.

but not to nationalism itself, which emphasizes instead the necessity of creating the nation in the present and of projecting its will into the future. Rather, what made Jansenism significant was its radical differentiation of the heavenly and temporal spheres, a distinction that produced a gap in which nationalism could form. Thus, Bell presents rhetorical similarities between sixteenth-century Protestant-Catholic polemics and French Anglophobe pamphlets as a sign that “religion was both the great absence and the great hidden presence” in which the *patrie* figured as “an object of religious devotion” (Bell, 3–47, 79–105, quotes on 7, 3, 101–2).

Nevertheless, Bell eschews an approach that would reduce nationalism to a mere substitute for religion. There was no necessary correlation, he argues, between the rise of nationalism and the decline of religious belief during the eighteenth century: it was more likely that the growing doubts of French parishioners concerning the existence of miracles and other signs of divine intervention were compensated for by “the interiorization of religious beliefs” (Bell, 37). Indeed, as Bell notes in his discussion of the “cult of great men” that emerged during the eighteenth century, the pantheonization of national heroes could be readily coupled with the devotional practices of Catholic Reformation. Later, during the Revolution, when French politicians came to the haunting conclusion that the nation was yet to be made, the Christian concept of “regeneration” served as a means of forging individuals into a new body politic of republican citizens through proven Catholic strategies: education, theater, and festivals (Bell, 107–21, 142–67, quotes on 107, 143).

Bell’s examination of incipient nationalism is not limited to Gauchet’s parameters, even if they remain apparent in his interpretive framework. First, *The Cult of the Nation* provides far greater richness of detail in describing specific cultural and intellectual contexts. For instance, taking cues from Keith Baker’s groundbreaking article (which was also informed by Gauchet) on the emergence of society as “our God, the ontological frame of our human existence,” Bell adds *nation* and *patrie* to the range of terms that replaced traditional religious referents during the eighteenth century.³⁰ Such terminology was put to a variety of uses, from arguments for the restoration of noble privileges to calls for individual sacrifice and greater social cohesion. After 1789, the willful nation and the fragile *patrie* were fused into a powerful, but unstable, form of Revolutionary nationalism (Bell, 50–77). Bell describes the campaign to fashion a polity deserving of adoration and even self-sacrifice as a departure from religion via the replication of religious institutional forms: “These efforts were, in theory, wholly secular. . . . But the means that republican reformers employed again reveals how deeply indebted they remained,

³⁰ Keith Michael Baker, “Enlightenment and the Institution of Society: Notes for a Conceptual History,” in *Main Trends in Cultural History: Ten Essays*, ed. Willem Melching and Wyger Velema (Amsterdam, 1994), 95–120, quote on 96.

in their project of building a nation, to the other, Catholic project of building the Church.” However, Bell also follows Mona Ozouf in challenging the view that the civic religion of the new regime resembled a “pastiche of Christianity.”³¹ In addition to their numerous allusions to classical antiquity, he adds, these celebrations of national unity were intended to “establish harmony and order in a wholly human world that existed on its own terms” rather than to substitute a regenerated nation for a fallen God (Bell, 143, 167). The analogs between religion and nationalism, therefore, derived more from means than from ends.

Along with Baker’s work, Bell’s illuminating and eloquent study makes it clear that Gauchet’s insights open lines of inquiry for cultural and intellectual historians. His arguments about the religious origins of modern nationalism are thoroughly substantiated by a broad array of sources, and, taken together, they supplement previous scholarship on the relationship between nationalism and industrial capitalism (Bell, 9). Nevertheless, Bell’s discussion of the mechanics of secularization remains somewhat obscure. Is the French nation, in Bell’s view, a secular institution with religious origins? Or did it emerge as a sacred institution in a newly secularized world? Bell’s approach is supple enough to accommodate both conclusions, but it tends to privilege juxtaposition over explication: God was sacred but absent; now the nation is both sacred and present.

The evidence that Bell cites, moreover, suggests additional dynamics at play. An anonymous *Discours sur le patriotisme* from 1788, for instance, defined love of country as “the forgetting of the man, to be nothing other than a citizen,” and as “the total abnegation of all feelings which are not directed towards the happiness of the City” (Bell, 155–56; emphasis added by Bell). As Bell notes, such declarations of political devotion were commonplace after 1789, especially during the Terror. However, calls for the complete surrender of self-interest, and even the self’s existence, did not always follow easily from the Catholic Reformation traditions that Bell claims provided a model for the French Revolutionaries. When one shifts attention away from the debates over Jansenism and toward other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious controversies, especially those surrounding the status of mystic theology, it becomes apparent that defenders of post-Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy often distanced themselves from, and even vilified, positions associated with excessive self-denial.

This antipathy became glaringly apparent in the 1690s during the Quietist Affair, a protracted debate over the limits of spiritual abandon in the mystic tradition. The controversy pitted against each other Bossuet and Fénelon, two

³¹ For Ozouf’s view, see Mona Ozouf, *La Fête Révolutionnaire, 1789–1799* (Paris, 1976), 446–74.

of the most prominent theological figures of the period, and required the intervention of both Louis XIV and Innocent XII. The immediate cause of the conflict was Fénelon's defense of his spiritual mentor, Jeanne-Marie Guyon, who held that the pure love of God required the soul to be stripped of all its powers of independent reflection and activity, even to the point of surrendering its hope for salvation. Guyon's doctrine, Bossuet charged, contradicted the Church's teachings on the need for the self to see a transcendent yet personal good in religious devotion.³² This polemic, I have argued elsewhere, was structured around two rival sets of claims. Bossuet and his partisans articulated their position in terms of a discourse of self-ownership that valorized the human subject's possession of, and accountability for, its ideas, actions, and other belongings. Fénelon and Guyon, in contrast, formulated a discourse of dispossession calling for the soul to surrender itself and all its goods to the directives of divine will.³³ These discourses, and the broader cultures of personhood associated with them, were predicated on conflicting reactions to the problem of transcendence: while proponents of self-ownership stressed the similarities between human and divine agency, advocates of dispossession called on the self to relinquish its place in favor of God.

Shifts in the function of religious rhetoric and strategies, therefore, could assume forms different from the one featured in Bell's account. In what follows, I will outline an opposing tendency that partially restored the dispossessive elements that Gauchet associates with the original religious impulse. This dynamic could also be regarded in terms of *resacralization*—that is, as a process by which the human subject, newly independent from the sway of an enchanted cosmos, was again placed under the control of nonhuman forces in the world. If the divine was growing more transcendent in the minds of certain Enlightenment-era observers, others felt its presence growing ever more immediate and imposing. These theologians and philosophers—represented here by Fénelon and Guyon, as well as by Spinoza and d'Holbach—called on the human person to abandon, indeed to alienate, possessive attachments to its internal functions and external objects. Their understanding of the self, expressed in terms of dispossession, posited a totalizing force to which the individual surrendered its existential goods. This force, identified as either God or nature, animated a revolution in immanence as sweeping as the revolution in transcendence identified by Gauchet and elaborated by Bell and other historians.

As the previous allusion to the *Discours sur le patriotisme* suggests, and as

³² For a fuller discussion of the theological stakes involved in the Quietist Affair, see Louis Cognet, *Crépuscule des mystiques, Bossuet-Fénelon*, new ed., with preface by J. R. Armogathe (Paris, 1991).

³³ I have previously examined the discourses of self-ownership and dispossession in "The Value of Dispossession: Rethinking Discourses of Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century France," *Modern Intellectual History* 2, no. 3 (2005): 299–326.

an examination of Enlightenment-era polemics over the nature and status of personhood in mysticism and materialism confirms, a return to immanence and self-dispossession remained an active possibility during the eighteenth century. The following section will illustrate how this alternative has tended to be obscured even by historians producing innovative work on the problem of secularization. Their contributions, while drawing attention to the function of transcendence in the emergence of modern concepts, have minimized the role of immanence in resacralizing the human world.

RETHINKING RELIGION IN ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Alyssa Sepinwall's *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution* explores, albeit indirectly, the vicissitudes of transcendence through shifts in the eighteenth-century ideal of universalism. She presents her monograph as an example of "new biography," in which the details of an individual life serve to exemplify, account for, and complicate the broader contexts in which it was led (Sepinwall, 4–7, quote on 4). Grégoire's long career is therefore presented as emblematic of the various attempts to institute universalism through regeneration that arose out of the close but volatile connections between post-Tridentine Catholicism, Enlightenment doctrines of progress, and Revolutionary attempts to refashion the body politic. The conceptual points at which these movements overlapped, with Grégoire often at the center, trace a secularizing process predicated on the displacement of theological meanings in human society. At the same time—and it is here that her analysis is especially suggestive—Grégoire's partial retreat from the universalist ideals he professed during the Revolution corresponded to a circumscribed understanding of the function of religion in a postreligious world. It is as if Grégoire, in fusing the values of the Enlightenment with the universal scope of Christian truth, presided over an exchange that would expand the significance of the former at the fatal expense of the latter.

Sepinwall carefully reconstructs the multiple sources from which Grégoire developed his views on church, state, and society. His education in Emberménil and Nancy exposed him to the reforming tendencies of Richerism, the universalizing impulses of Augustin Calmet's *Histoire de l'ancien et du nouveau testaments des juifs* (1718), and philosophical ideals of progress, sociability, and public utility. All these influences would come to bear on Grégoire's early career as a curé and as a participant in the affairs of the Société des Philantropes of Strasbourg. Sepinwall clearly demonstrates that Grégoire reconciled these diverse influences in his commitment to the ideal of regeneration: not only his parishioners and other Catholics but even non-Christians were implored to attain knowledge useful for bettering themselves as productive and contented members of society (Sepinwall, 15–55).

This ambition manifested itself with particular clarity in an essay that Grégoire submitted in 1781 to a contest sponsored by the Academy of Metz on improving the lives of French Jews. Situating his views in the discursive possibilities of the time, Sepinwall shows Grégoire to have rejected both “unconditionalist” and “impossibilist” positions for an emphasis on regeneration: Jews could and should be assimilated into French society, but only on the condition that they underwent moral and political transformation. Sepinwall then situates Grégoire’s essay in the semantic history of “regeneration” during the Enlightenment. The term originally referred both to the spiritual effects of baptism and the physical processes by which bodies repair themselves. But over the course of the eighteenth century, she argues, regeneration increasingly took on significance as a nontheological form of self-instituted moral improvement. In so doing, the concept underwent a gradual “secularization.” By the time the Estates-General met in 1789, she observes, “regeneration was no longer only the province of God, but rather an operation that could be directed by humans. Moreover, regeneration could now be effected upon the body politic itself rather than simply upon the bodies of individual Christians.” Grégoire, however, incorporated the term’s range of meanings in his assertion that Christianity alone could give Jews the basis not only for moral but also for theological, political, and physical reform. Despite his allegiance to the Enlightened ideal of toleration, he failed to clarify how to reconcile the ideal of universalism with the realities of difference (Sepinwall, 56–77, quotes on 58–59, 62).

Grégoire’s activities after 1789 exacerbated such tensions, as the convergence of Christian and republican values he espoused collapsed in the wake of political and religious violence. This outcome, moreover, was at least partly predetermined by opposing tendencies within the universalist project. Sepinwall argues that “just as the abbé had suggested before the Revolution that Jews needed to transform themselves to become fully integrated into society, he now envisioned a similar process for other groups, such as dialect speakers and nonwhites”—and, ultimately, for women as well. Grégoire’s aspirations also extended to the Church itself. As constitutional bishop of Loir-et-Cher, he aimed to achieve among his flock a total regeneration of moral, religious, intellectual, and physical faculties. The social order, having emancipated itself from the traditional hierarchies of the *ancien régime*, could in turn “create a unitary people where one did not yet exist.” The universalist orientation of this enterprise, of course, made regional differences suspect. As both Sepinwall and Bell have noted, the eradication of patois, originally the ambition of proselytizing clerics, was likewise perceived as necessary for the protection of republican homogeneity (Sepinwall, 81–108, quotes on 87–88, 91).

While Grégoire initially undertook these projects with enthusiasm, his faith in the new republican order proved difficult to sustain. The Constitutional Church that Grégoire had so intensely championed became a source of

conflict, and he was repeatedly disappointed by his parishioners' resistance to his reforms. The dechristianization movement led by radical Jacobins such as Jacques-René Hébert further alienated him from the Revolution, although he continued to profess belief in its egalitarian values. As Robespierre's government by Terror gave way to Thermidor, the Directory, the Napoleonic regimes, and finally the Restoration, the abbé shifted the focus of his aspirations from the metropole to the colonies, but even here he met with repeated failures. By this time, however, he found himself clinging to a lonely middle ground between Catholic royalism and secular democracy. Likewise, he moved away from the commitment to regenerating society through his own efforts, instead holding out for the possibility of "divine intercession" to overcome human sinfulness (Sepinwall, 109–98, quote on 165).

Grégoire's "disenchantment," as Sepinwall calls it, seems to resemble the course that Gauchet has theorized on a broader scale: Grégoire played a decisive part in undermining traditional Catholicism from within, and the ensuing break could not be undone. Moreover, the abbé's failed program lends further credence to Taylor's observation that "Reform" proceeded in a halting and nonlinear fashion. In Sepinwall's account, this outcome followed from the contradictory impulses of regeneration "to support a Christian Revolution and to work against the Church" (Sepinwall, 166, 109). In the end, Grégoire was compelled to retreat into a more personal form of religious devotion that stood apart from a now autonomous society.

To point out such similarities is not to criticize Sepinwall for failing to adopt a particular theoretical view but, rather, to ask whether her study could have gone further toward making the process of secularization to which she alluded at earlier moments in Grégoire's career more explicit at its end. It is telling that the abbé gradually jettisoned the more "Enlightened" elements of his universalism. For instance, he abandoned his faith in natural human goodness for the doctrine of original sin, and he even began to doubt his long-standing hope for Jewish regeneration. Moreover, Sepinwall notes that after Thermidor, Grégoire sought to deploy historical precedent as a check on the impulse for regeneration, which he increasingly described in terms of purification rather than as the *ex novo* creation of a perfect world (Sepinwall, 199–216). It would seem as though the abbé, estranged from the Revolutionary movement he had helped to initiate, retreated into a belief in humanity's dependence on religion as the source of meaningful transformation. But Sepinwall largely passes over this aspect of Grégoire's disenchantment, thereby forgoing an opportunity to complicate the equation of secularization with the erosion of religious legitimacy.

In the epilogue to her study, Sepinwall calls attention to Grégoire's contradictory legacies. While the French government continues to uphold him as an exemplar of republican virtue, Arthur Hertzberg has cited his persistent

hopes for the conversion of the Jews as typical of the Enlightenment's complicity with antisemitism (Seginwall, 221, 229).³⁴ Likewise, one of the aims of Adam Sutcliffe's *Judaism and Enlightenment* is to interrogate the essential paradoxes that have structured the relationship of religion to philosophy. His analysis shows, through the careful reconstruction of a variety of contexts, that Jewish theology and history forced Enlightenment thought to confront its Christian sources as well as the incomplete triumph of its rationalist imperative. Sutcliffe declares his commitment to the view that the Enlightenment intensified secularization, and, like Jonathan Israel, he emphasizes the transnational movement's common goals as well as its roots in the seventeenth century. At the same time, he follows Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in affirming that the Enlightenment contains violent and potentially lethal contradictions, such as that between myth and reason (Sutcliffe, 1–6, 11–15).

Sutcliffe characterizes the Enlightenment's perennial difficulty in resolving the status of Judaism as one of "ambivalence" and "ambiguity," terms that occur repeatedly in the interpretive sections of each chapter. For instance, the ideal of toleration proved difficult to extend to Jews, who were depicted either as unrepentant in their provincialism or as the subjects of possible conversion. Typical of this position was Voltaire, who wondered aloud how Judaism, which presented the obverse of the Enlightenment, could be tolerated by—much less assimilated into—its rational values. In the end, the philosophe concluded that Jewish emancipation necessitated the surrender of any distinct religious or cultural identity, a view that, as Seginwall and others have shown, would inform official policy during the French Revolution and beyond (Sutcliffe, 6–11, 213–46, quotes on 9, 19).

What distinguishes Sutcliffe's account from other studies is his emphasis on the effects of seventeenth-century religious debates in defining the relationship between Judaism and the Enlightenment.³⁵ For instance, he begins his narrative by charting the rise and fall of Christian Hebraism as indicative of the shifting status of biblical criticism on the eve of the Enlightenment. Medieval scholars had been concerned largely with uncovering predictions of Christ's birth in the Old Testament and, thus, with exposing the errors of first-century Jews. By the early seventeenth century, Protestant theologians—particularly Calvinists such as Johannes Buxtorf and Jacques Basnage—had

³⁴ Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1990).

³⁵ For instance, see Ronald Schechter's excellent study, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715–1815* (Berkeley, 2003), which, like Sutcliffe's work, emphasizes the paradoxical oscillations between inclusion and exclusion that characterized eighteenth-century treatments of Judaism, while limiting its chronological scope to the French Enlightenment and Revolution.

adopted far more nuanced and erudite approaches to Jewish Scripture that at least intermittently engaged with Talmudic tradition. Equally instructive is Sutcliffe's attention to broader contexts surrounding the shifting fortunes of Hebraism. To cite but one example, he carefully situates the Huguenot Basnage's position in the intellectual and political fallout of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the polemics that broke out among Protestant émigrés to the Dutch Republic (Sutcliffe, 26–30, 79–89, 103–17).

While Sutcliffe provides an overview of forays in Jewish theological and historical sources that marked the seventeenth century, he also notes that this interest was to prove sharply double-edged. In particular, the surge in the study of Hebrew accompanied the rise of new strategies of textual criticism that increasingly cast doubt on the possibility of “transparent biblical exegesis,” a skepticism that pervaded Bayle's *Dictionnaire critique et historique*. By the time of this work's publication in 1697, Sutcliffe argues, collections of Jewish theology, like Giulio Bartolucci's sprawling *Biblioteca Magna Rabbinica* (1675–93), signaled the loss of Hebraism's former vitality and its devolution into mere “encyclopaedism.” At the same time, heightened awareness that the world depicted in the Bible substantially differed from that of subsequent periods triggered an effort on the part of Vico and others to segregate Jewish sacred history from the “otherwise universal pattern of historical development,” with an eye toward the “secularisation of Gentile history.” Bayle made a related move in presenting the recalcitrance of the ancient Hebrews as evidence that, in Judaism, “the voice of godly morality is uniquely and crucially absent” (Sutcliffe, 31–38, 77–78, 89–99, quotes on 31, 38, 78, 95). Sutcliffe's narrative of secularization, like others reviewed in this essay, situates the departure from religion within the religious sphere. It also alludes, although less directly, to the role of displaced divinity in instituting the human world as a determining source of meaning. His emphasis on the status of Judaism, moreover, allows for a fascinating insight: for Christians, the hidden God remained provocatively present in the traditions of his chosen people.

The contradictory impulses in the nascent Enlightenment's relationship to Judaism were never clearer than in the case of Spinoza. His devastating engagement with biblical criticism in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670), according to Sutcliffe, “primitivises and infantilises” the Jews of the Old Testament while continuing to regard Scripture as their authentic, if flawed, history. Paradoxically, Spinoza would later undergo a rather different transfiguration as the “Messiah of the Enlightenment.” Sutcliffe examines how, after the philosopher's death in 1677, his biographers made painstaking efforts to “de-judaize” his thought by emphasizing his tranquil “self-mastery” and blithe detachment from any confessional identity. Nevertheless, Spinoza's early affiliation with Judaism left this universalist image fraught with a

productive tension: his first biographer, Jean Maximilien Lucas, likened his subject to Christ—another great philosopher who, having rejected the prejudices of his time, set forth to preach the love of God and neighbor. His life and death, furthermore, announced the appearance of a new source of truth for humanity, that of the Enlightenment. Sutcliffe seizes on such ambiguities to show how the original paradox at the center of Enlightenment universalism could never fully transcend the particularities of its founder (Sutcliffe, 118–47, quotes on 123, 133). Sutcliffe's Spinoza, even more than Sepinwall's Grégoire, symbolizes an ideal that began to fail at the moment of its inception.

In addition, *Judaism and Enlightenment* also breaks considerable new ground when dealing with the role of the Kabbalah in the formation of radical philosophy. Sutcliffe describes Jewish mysticism, with its analogs in the Gnostic and Neoplatonic traditions, not only as “the universal core buried within the historical particularism of Judaism” but also as a “mystical *prisca theologica*” that straddled the divide between “Renaissance esotericism” and the “practical universalism of the Enlightenment.” Given these multiple uses, it is not entirely surprising that interest in the Kabbalah deepened during the seventeenth century alongside early Enlightenment attempts to articulate the bases for a natural religion. For example, the theologian Georg Wachter, despite an early aversion to the tradition, later embraced its denial of the distinctions between God and world. Wachter went so far as to identify this position with that of Spinoza—even though the latter had denounced the Jewish mysticism in his *Tractatus Politicus* (1677). Both the Kabbalah and Spinozist philosophy aimed at “a mystical spiritualisation of matter” under the aegis of pantheistic monism (Sutcliffe, 148–64, quotes on 148, 153–54, 158). Another contemporary commentator, Thomas Burnet, described the creation narrative of the Kabbalah in similar terms. Not unlike Stoics and Neoplatonists, he observed, Jewish mystics “explain the Rise of all Things by Emanations from the first Cause” and describe an eventual “Restoration to their primitive State,” which occurs “when all Things again become God.”³⁶

According to Wachter and Burnet, then, Kabbalist theology held out the hope that the estranging activity of transcendence that gave rise to the material and spiritual worlds would one day be reversed. In a word, the divinity that had once been hidden would return to and in a resacralized world. Moreover, this move would entail the retreat of the human person, as opposed to the withdrawal of the divine that precipitated creation. It is noteworthy that Spinoza's work, which both Wachter and Leibniz associated with the Kabbalah, followed such a course (Sutcliffe, 162–64). Their pronouncements corroborate the position staked out in this essay: alongside an awareness of the

³⁶ Thomas Burnet, *Doctrina antiqua de rerum originibus* (London, 1736), 80–81.

expanding distance between God and creation there was an opposing tendency to dissolve the boundaries between them.

Sutcliffe's thought-provoking study offers crucial insights into the Enlightenment's ambivalence over its religious origins and, especially, into its profound debt to biblical scholarship. Both of these themes are treated with equal perspicacity by Jonathan Sheehan in *The Enlightenment Bible*. The paradoxes that attend supposedly secular approaches to religious difference, Sheehan claims, are also to be found in the development of "Enlightened" stances toward Scripture. While Sheehan recognizes the problematic position of Judaism in Enlightenment thought, he embeds it in a more general process by which the Bible was remade into the textual authority for post-theological culture (Sheehan, xiv).

Whereas Sutcliffe took theoretical cues from Horkheimer and Adorno, Sheehan introduces his study with a quotation from Blumenberg, who, as was previously noted, regarded modernity as an unprecedented response to the problem of divine omnipotence, one that ultimately produced a radical break with theological explanations of the cosmos. Sheehan shares with Blumenberg a lack of interest in models that posit the simple translation of religious categories and institutions into secular ones, but his object of study, the Bible, puts him in a stronger position to examine the fate of religion in the modern world. Thus, he concentrates "less on the disappearance of religion than on its transformation and reconstruction" (Sheehan, xi). His method, moreover, loosely follows Blumenberg's claim in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* that the "identity" between theological and secular categories "is not one of contents but one of functions."³⁷ Sheehan contends that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century efforts to assemble translations of the Bible alongside voluminous commentary represented the "enlightenment" of Scripture through shifts in media more than in message. This approach leads Sheehan to redefine the Enlightenment as the "new constellation of practices and institutions . . . that the eighteenth century used to access a host of religious, historical, and philosophical questions inherited from the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution" (Sheehan, xi–xii).

These interpretative decisions assign new significance to Bible translation as a subject of study in the dual histories of Enlightenment and secularization. Sheehan first establishes the backdrop of his approach in Reformation-era translations of the sacred canon, from those of Erasmus and Luther to the King James Bible. While these works presented Scripture that was "extracted from its Catholic superstructure," they also "invented the tools of biblical decanonization" through their use of philological and historical scholarship (Sheehan, 1–25, quote on 14). A new flurry of translation occurred in the seven-

³⁷ Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 64.

teenth and eighteenth centuries as a response not only to renewed assaults from both Catholics and radical Protestants but also to the threat posed by philosophical deism. The original impetus for this work, Sheehan notes, arose in England but soon moved to Germany. While English scholars such as John Mill were preoccupied with meeting the challenges posed by Spinoza and other radical exegetes of the Scripture, their German counterparts sought to reconcile the Bible with the spirit of Pietism. In the translations of Johann Henrich Retz, Johann Kayer, and especially the group that compiled the Berleberger Bible (1726–40), the subjectivizing tendencies of Pietist devotion, with its emphasis on sentiment over formal theology, merged with critical scholarly practices to produce Scripture that was “shorn of all theology and freely available to interpretation by all” (Sheehan, 54–85, quote on 83). Once freed from its theological binding, the Bible could be transformed by “the dispersive media of the Enlightenment.” Over the next half century, sacred writings were increasingly divorced from direct “commands of God” and repackaged as a source of historical evidence, as a pedagogical tool for moral instruction, as a literary representation of German national identity, and as the repository of ancient Hebrew tradition. The Enlightenment Bible, then, established the conditions for a “cultural Bible” that could subsist “independent of theology” and serve as “a cornerstone of the literary, poetic, moral, and pedagogical values of Western civilization” (Sheehan, 87–221, quotes on 89, 220).

As Sheehan repeatedly makes clear, his history of the Enlightenment Bible does not conform to classic narratives of secularization. Scriptural authority, in his view, did not decline so much as it mutated into different forms according to the textual frameworks in which it is placed (Sheehan, 259–60). Nevertheless, it is clear that this process assumed a relatively straightforward trajectory. Scripture went from serving as the voice of God’s wisdom to forming part of the annals of human wisdom. In taking an Enlightened form, what was once the content of theology becomes that of culture—defined by Sheehan, following Herder, as the “‘entire living picture of the ways of life, customs, [and] needs’ of a nation” (Sheehan, 219). The Bible, which had formerly represented the nonhuman origins of history, was translated into a foundational text of temporal autonomy.

Yet this secular turn would have been impossible, Sheehan suggests, without the catalyst of Pietism, a Lutheran reform movement with deep roots in the mystic tradition. Sheehan is certainly justified in identifying Pietist devotion with religious “individualism,” especially given its privileging of conscience, but such an emphasis obscures countervailing tendencies that called the self’s cognitive faculties into question. Indeed, among early Pietism’s influences was the notorious Madame Guyon, whose theology of self-annihilation had

been the spark that set off the Quietist Affair.³⁸ According to Guyon, the self must “lose without ceasing its entire will in the will of God” and remain “indifferent to all things, whether for the body or the soul, for temporal possessions or eternal possessions.”³⁹ This is not to say that Sheehan is unaware of similar turns against spiritual agency. As he observes in his discussion of German Romanticism, Schleiermacher’s “theology of feeling” repeatedly emphasized “an absolute dependence on God” (Sheehan, 229). Nevertheless, *The Enlightenment Bible* situates these findings within an overarching narrative of the rise of cultural autonomy without considering the extent to which figures like Schleiermacher also represented an opposing shift toward dispossession.⁴⁰ Spinoza’s praise of determinism, Guyon’s arguments against spiritual self-ownership, and Schleiermacher’s recognition of humanity’s eternal indebtedness to God all contributed, in their various ways, to a radically immanent critique of transcendence, one that undermined autonomy on the basis of the persistent and immediate presence of the divine.

The final study under review, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* by Louis Dupré, addresses many of the topics and problematics examined in the works of Bell, Sepinwall, Sutcliffe, and Sheehan, although in a necessarily less detailed and more schematic manner. This “intellectual portrait of a crucial epoch” more closely approximates a synthetic survey than a discrete, specialized monograph, and thus it serves as a gauge of the extent to which revisions of the secularization thesis have been incorporated into general accounts of the Enlightenment. Indeed, Dupré generally favors a variant term he calls “secularism,” a movement that coexisted with ongoing religious thought and devotion.⁴¹ Departing from a universalist equation of secularization and modernity, Dupré, like Taylor, concludes that the Western experience is rather more historically circumscribed: Islam, for instance, has never been compelled to challenge its own “traditional worldview” (Dupré, xiv, 318, ix). Dupré’s study thus poses the question of the contours and consequences of this break not only in philosophy but also in moral, social, political, and religious thought.

The central scene in Dupré’s tableau depicts the emergence of the human mind as the sole “source of meaning and value.” As with Blumenberg, Gauchet, and Taylor, the autonomy of the self is here presented as a response

³⁸ On Guyon’s influence on Pietism, see Pierre-Maurice Masson, *La religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1916), 1:68–70.

³⁹ Jeanne-Marie Guyon, “*Moyen court et très-facile pour faire oraison*,” in *Le “Moyen court” et autres écrits spirituels: Une simplicité subversive*, ed. Marie-Louise Gondal (Grenoble, 1995), 74–75.

⁴⁰ Gauchet, *Disenchantment of the World*, 61.

⁴¹ While “secularism” has seven entries in the book’s index and “secularization” is not mentioned, the latter term appears at least once in the text (Dupré, *Enlightenment*, 283).

to theological problems originating in the medieval period. Once God had been enshrined as absolute in the “classical-Christian synthesis” of nominalist theology, transcendence posed as much of a threat as an assurance. The omnipotence of divine will, Dupré observes, “abrogated the link of intelligibility that connected the source of reality with its created effect,” so that “God no longer provided rational justification of the world.” In the aftermath of this rupture, “meaning” would now have to be “imposed by the human mind,” a task that in turn required Descartes, Locke, Kant, and their contemporaries to develop “a new sense of selfhood” (Dupré, xi-6, 19–46, quotes on xi, 2–3, 45).

However, Dupré’s statements about individualism, which are informed by twentieth-century critics of subjectivity such as Paul Ricoeur and Michel Foucault, overlook certain contingent factors in the formation of modern personhood. As Jerrold Seigel has recently argued, such pronouncements on the sweeping powers supposedly claimed by the Cartesian subject misrepresent its rather modest origins. While Descartes had originally sought to redraw the contours of nature along mechanistic lines, after the condemnation of Galileo he was forced to retreat from an all-encompassing demonstration of Copernicanism to the less ambitious task of establishing how the mind could arrive at even the most rudimentary knowledge.⁴² Descartes evaded Dupré’s conundrum precisely because the recognition of God as the guarantor of the self’s clear and distinct ideas fell back on the support of a transcendent divine. It was not for humans to pass judgment on the legitimacy of the cosmos in which they find themselves, since they lacked complete access to God’s rationale of creation.

Dupré’s descriptions adhere better to Kant’s philosophy of the subject, which declared that the self’s knowledge always depends on its own perspective, without the assurance of divine fiat that what seems to be actually is. It is precisely this egocentric orientation that leads Dupré to argue that Enlightenment thinking about the self suffered from a persistent failure to resolve the problem of otherness. To be sure, both Sepinwall and Sutcliffe have explored this problem at length, especially as it pertains to religious, ethnic, and gender diversity. As for Dupré’s study, the main significance of the problem of difference stems from the incomplete solutions put to it in Enlightenment-era aesthetics, moral philosophy, and political thought. In all these domains, the delegitimation of traditional identities, institutions, and other intermediaries entailed the estrangement of the human person, which became a universal, abstract entity separated from its particular, embodied existence (Dupré, 47–48, 75–186).

⁴² Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 2005), 56–73.

Dupré complements this account with an attentiveness to cultural continuities between the Enlightenment and preceding periods. Although historical thought during the eighteenth century tended to privilege the possibilities of the future over obligations to the past, at least some measure of faith in distant origins informs works such as Bossuet's *Histoire universelle* and even Vico's *Scienza nuova*, the latter imploring readers to preserve the "poetic wisdom" of the ancients or else sacrifice their present to a meaningless rationalism. Nor did eighteenth-century historians unanimously profess a belief in progress. Vico, for instance, viewed providence as a cyclical pattern of advancement and decline. Edward Gibbon, the century's most illustrious historian, went even farther in his refusal to accept Enlightenment claims of progress at face value. Despite his commitment to the idea that material and intellectual improvements could forestall decline, the imposing shadow of Rome cast doubt on the possibility that vast empires could avoid its fate in the end. Dupré's interpretation on this point differs from that of J. G. A. Pocock, who argues in his massive study of *The Decline and Fall* that Gibbon usually resisted the temptation to equate Rome's landed empire with Britain's maritime, commercial network of colonies. Both Pocock and Dupré agree, however, that Gibbon's work effectively removed Christian ends from narratives of the past, thereby facilitating what Pocock calls "an emancipation of secular history from sacred" (Dupré, 187–228, quote on 195).⁴³

The final chapters of *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* examine seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reactions to the sequestering of religion. Although Dupré does not cite any of the studies discussed in this essay, he nonetheless surveys much of their terrain. Like Bell, for instance, he observes that religion moved to the periphery in part owing to the rise of the nation-state during the eighteenth century. In addition, he notes along with Sheehan that biblical scholarship provided a means for reducing Scripture to the status of local history. It is on this point that Dupré returns to a major theme of his work, that rationalism succeeded more in casting doubt on traditional ways of formulating knowledge than in replacing them with a new content. One response to this failure was the emergence of a "spiritual counter-culture" during the period. Quietists and Pietists, Dupré contends, turned their backs on the question of self-assertion and instead advocated "a passive surrender to God's will." However, their affirmation of the doctrinal independence of individual believers ultimately reinforced the Enlightenment's most characteristic tendency: the institution of the individual human person as the source of meaning (Dupré, 229–329, quotes on 318, 326).

⁴³ J. G. A. Pocock, *The First Decline and Fall*, vol. 3 of *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge, 2003), 127–50, quote on 128.

Dupré's final verdict on the Enlightenment is one of qualified support. While he praises the movement's goals of toleration and autonomy, he does not fail to recognize the costs of pursuing them (Dupré, 334–39). On this point his account takes a dialectical turn. As he observes in the opening pages of his study, the Enlightenment successfully “raised consciousness to the universality of reason,” but only by instituting “culture” as “alienation from one's natural self.” The result of this “estrangement,” he adds, has been the bifurcation of reason and faith: either the mind rejects all that appears foreign to it, or else it attempts to return to the security of an otherworldly sphere. Neither of these choices is sufficient, so that modern culture deepens a void in which personal identity is forever threatened with dissolution (Dupré, 12–13).

This problematic—acknowledged in various ways by Blumenberg, Gauchet, and others—continues to resonate in present-day efforts to revise the secularization thesis. For example, Bell notes that French nationalism has yet to reconcile its universalist principles with the diverse identities of the populations it is meant to encompass. In a similar manner, Sepinwall's Grégoire recoiled from Revolutionary universalism once it ceased to conform to his particular designs for citizenship. According to Sutcliffe, Judaism haunted Enlightenment-era thinkers precisely because it reminded them of a grounded source of religious, political, and moral values that they could not uproot. Finally, the “cultural bible” of Sheehan's study represents the ultimate disintegration of theological givenness into an array of appropriations: the Scripture can now serve whatever task its human inventors have at hand. All these instances show secularization to be what Taylor has also claimed: a project that will perhaps never be completed. It is hardly surprising, then, that historians of the Enlightenment would seek to redefine a movement that has come to spin in such disorienting circles.

TOWARD A MODEL OF RESACRALIZATION: REVOLUTIONS IN IMMANENCE

The studies under review represent significant revisions to the narrative of secularization. Their point of departure, as this essay has argued, is Enlightenment-era reactions to the inaccessibility of a radically transcendent, hidden God. By investing temporal concepts and institutions with new meanings that approximated religion's function of legitimizing human existence, eighteenth-century philosophers and theologians made the imperatives of the temporal sphere as binding as divine hierarchies once had been. Of course, the operative elements of this process varied, depending on the monograph in question: for Bell and Sepinwall, it was the regeneration of the nation-state and its inhabitants; for Sutcliffe, it was the Enlightenment's efforts to transcend Judaism; for Sheehan, it was the translation and repackaging of Scripture; for Dupré, it was the human person's emergence as the fundamental source of meaning.

Yet each of these scholars insists that religious culture had a decisive influence on the formation of “secular” ideals and institutions. Enlightenment and religion, so long regarded as antithetical to each other, are now viewed as overlapping and interdependent agents of historical change.

The intensification of divine transcendence, however, did not necessarily establish the conditions for human autonomy. As I suggested above, mystic theologians such as Fénelon formulated a different response to the dilemmas posed by a deity whose motives had become virtually unknowable. In so doing, he departed from the post-Tridentine doctrine that reaffirmed the soul’s intrinsic interest in salvation as a function of the natural desire for happiness. Drawing the opposite conclusion, he maintained that the soul was obliged to love God even if it were damned, thus severing the logical and moral connections between human action and the spiritual recompense offered by a hidden deity. On this view, the soul should surrender its possessive attachment to all things, even to itself, so as to make the divine present once more. As he wrote in an undated letter of spiritual direction to Louis XIV’s morganatic wife, Madame de Maintenon, “one does not find God purely alone except in this loss of all his gifts, and in this real sacrifice of all of himself, after having lost all interior resources.” Yet radical dispossession returns all that it strips away, insofar as the soul now finds within itself God alone. This presence, Fénelon was careful to note, cannot be regarded as a “gift” but, rather, as “God himself, immediately alone, . . . who, without being possessed by the soul, possesses it for his own sake.”⁴⁴ In its purest form, then, the love of God detaches the human person from any independent claim of autonomous action and takes the place, as an immanent force, of the self’s particular existence. As Fénelon made clear in his *Traité de l’existence et des attributs de Dieu* (1712, 1718), God’s transcendence could give way to a proximity that blurred the boundaries of creator and created. Divine light, he claimed, is “infinitely beyond us,” yet “so familiar and so intimate to us, that we always find it as near to us as we are to ourselves.”⁴⁵

Similar illustrations of immanent dispossession abounded during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While Fénelon’s censure in 1699 appeared to neutralize the threat posed by mysticism, Christian apologists turned from this victory to confront attacks on human agency stemming from Spinozist and materialist circles. A key battle in this polemic was fought over the status of free will as a property of the thinking subject, whether human or divine. Spinoza aimed to demonstrate that God acts *as* nature, not *on* nature, and out of sheer necessity. Created beings operated under a similar compulsion. The

⁴⁴ Fénelon, “Nécessité de la purification de l’âme par rapport aux dons de Dieu, et spécialement aux amitiés,” in *Oeuvres complètes de Fénelon*, ed. M. Gosselin, 10 vols. (Paris, 1851–52; reprint, Geneva, 1971), 1:605–6.

⁴⁵ Fénelon, “Traité de l’existence et des attributs de Dieu,” in *Oeuvres*, 1:68.

distinction between subject and object, famously associated with Descartes, was thereby dissolved. To cite the *Ethics* (1677): “When we say that the human mind perceives this or that thing, we say nothing else than that God possesses this or that idea.”⁴⁶ In other words, the subject’s thoughts are not its own, unique to itself, but are the manifestation of God thinking in the world and through the mind. It followed from this premise that “there is no absolute or free will,” a conclusion that undermined the possibility of transcendence for any being.⁴⁷ Spinoza therefore understood the highest form of wisdom, which he called the “intellectual love of God,” to be the recognition of the determined character of our existence. We are, he asserted, “part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow.”⁴⁸ In consequence, true liberty “is to be and to remain chained by the bonds of [God’s] love.”⁴⁹ And this love, Spinoza claimed, was not directed toward the individual human person. It was, on the contrary, “part of the infinite love with which God loves Himself.”⁵⁰ For Spinoza, then, intellectual love is radically self-referential—not to the human subject, but to divine substance. The beatified self exists merely as an effect of God/Nature’s immanent presence and totalizing force. At the same time, Spinoza extended dispossession beyond what Fénelon’s Christian beliefs would permit, since the divine was likewise deprived of creative autonomy.

D’Holbach, in his infamous treatise, *Système de la nature* (1770), echoed and amplified many of Spinoza’s monist sentiments. Since the totality of nature is “but an immense chain of causes and effects that ceaselessly follow from one to the other,” it stood to reason that the self does not possess “independent energy, an isolated cause,” or “detached action” from its fellow beings. An empirical investigation of the natural world suffices to prove that “man is in each instance of his life a passive instrument in the hands of necessity.”⁵¹ Nor is the divine afforded any greater latitude of thought or movement. While it is ironic that d’Holbach chose to present nature as a speaking and seeing goddess in the final pages of his treatise, he repeatedly stressed that nature should not be regarded as a subject, divine or otherwise, despite apparent indications to the contrary: “When I say that nature produces

⁴⁶ Benedict [Baruch] Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *A Spinoza Reader*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ, 1994), 105–6, 122–23, quote on 123 (IP32, IIP10–11, quote from IIP11C).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 144–47, quote on 147 (IIP45–48, quote from IIP48, pt. 2).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 259, 244 (V32C, IVApp32).

⁴⁹ This quotation is taken from Spinoza’s supplement to the *Ethics*, published as *Dieu, l’homme et la béatitude*, trans. and introduction by Paul Janet (Paris, 1878), 124.

⁵⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 259–61, quote on 259 (VP32–37, quote from VP36).

⁵¹ D’Holbach, *Système de la nature, ou Des loix du monde Physique & du monde moral*, new ed., 2 vols. (London, 1771), 1:55–82, quotes on 55, 81.

an effect, I do not at all claim to personalize it. . . . We cannot call nature intelligent in the manner of some of the beings it encompasses.”⁵²

D’Holbach’s caveat is essential for understanding the implications of his system for the relationship between person and nature, but also between the transcendent and the immanent. If nature is meant to assume the role once assigned to the divine in Christian theology, it does so in an entirely different manner—not as an all-knowing, all-powerful subject, but as a blind and will-less force. At the same time, the human person is both identified with and in large part reduced to an effect of this force. D’Holbach’s abandonment of transcendence in his materialist system thus drastically altered the relationship between God and soul as it was understood in orthodox religion. What had been an exchange between two distinct, albeit unequal persons, was reduced to an arrangement between two objects. The meaning of immanence likewise changed. Once mainline Christian theology began to assert the self’s inward transcendence vis-à-vis the world as “masters and possessors of nature” (to cite Descartes), atheist philosophes such as d’Holbach reacted by asserting the immanent power of things to dispossess the self in order to repudiate the concept of divinity that stood behind it. However, this was no mere reversion to the world of “enchantment.” While d’Holbach was momentarily willing to anthropomorphize nature for rhetorical effect, he and Spinoza persistently applied the mechanized organization of the universe to human beings as well. In lieu of the semitranscendent, personified objects of the enchanted universe, one was left with the prospect of a world inhabited by wholly immanent, objectified entities.

This brief glimpse into Enlightenment-era controversies over mysticism and materialism both corroborates and problematizes the revised narratives of secularization found in the studies reviewed in this essay. For defenders of self-ownership, the human person—like the nation or society—was thought to derive its autonomy from a remote and transcendent God demanding that created beings exercise their faculties on their own, for their own purposes. However, historians have often neglected the violent reactions to this development. Radical spiritualists and radical philosophers railed against what they regarded as illegitimate claims for self-ownership by calling for a revival of immanent dispossession. This challenge implied a dramatic reversal of transcendence in a resacralized world: the self must evacuate its position in favor of a totalizing force, thereby neutralizing its personal autonomy and allowing the divine (or what remained of it in nature) to inhabit the place that the individual human person claimed to occupy.

Despite these oppositions, secularization and resacralization should be regarded as complementary phenomena that arose in response to the problem

⁵² Ibid., 1:11–12, 2:443–49, quote on 1:12.

of a radically transcendent, hidden God. The studies under review, then, are of crucial importance, but their full significance requires a supplementary analysis. Novel conceptions of society, the nation, Scripture, and personhood followed from an intensification of divine transcendence, and, at the same time, necessitated a reworking of the immanent relations between worldly persons, institutions, and things. It was not merely that secularization, now understood by Bell and others as the translation of divine authority into a worldly register, entailed that the latter incorporate the properties and prerogatives once reserved for God alone. Enlightenment-era efforts to resacralize the self as an object of a totalizing force—situated either in the mystic divine or in a purely immanent, materialist conception of nature—suggest another dynamic at work: the closing of the chasm between the divine and terrestrial spheres and the identification of one with the other. Even if human effort was increasingly regarded as the source of one's understanding of the world, the humans undertaking this work had become newly alien to themselves, and in a manner that recalled the radical distance of the divine.