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John C. O'Neal, *Changing Minds: the Shifting Perception of Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, Newark and London, University of Delaware Press, 2002. xiii + 273 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.50. (hb). ISBN: 0-87413-788-8.

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John C. O'Neal's first two books established their author as a leading interpreter of the French Enlightenment, at home on both sides of the border between literary and intellectual history. *Seeing and Observing: Rousseau's Rhetoric of Perception* (1985) analyzed the epistemological foundations of Rousseau's writing, turning on the key concept of "perception." *The Authority of Experience: Sensationist Theory in the French Enlightenment* (1996) was a wide-ranging survey, tracing the fortunes of the major French contribution to the theory of knowledge. With *Changing Minds: the Shifting Perception of Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, O'Neal maintains this focus on epistemology, while casting his thematic net still further. His topic here is nothing less than the dialectic between "nature" and "culture" themselves, though with "perception" again at the center of the story. The book remains a set of loosely connected case studies, rather than a comprehensive treatment of its subject. But *Changing Minds* does offer at least the outlines of a larger narrative, with results that are both illuminating and disconcerting.

O'Neal's starting point is in the realm of aesthetics, with a close reading of the abbé Du Bos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, first published in 1719. Here "nature" and "culture" appeared in intimate alliance, Du Bos's naturalist theory of art already pointing—distantly—toward the egalitarian and universalist politics of the Revolution. Voltaire, an admirer of both Du Bos's aesthetic theory and his historical writings, is up next. O'Neal argues that Voltaire's own historical works, the *Essai sur les moeurs* in particular tended to drive a wedge between nature and culture—or rather, "civilisation," the term preferred by Voltaire. "Nature" was indeed implicated in each of the impediments to civilization decried by Voltaire: religious superstition, the "partisan spirit" of feudal politics, and the primitive "instincts" that human beings shared with animals. As if in properly dialectical response, O'Neal then turns in his third chapter to the two most important meditations on the question of animal "souls" of the early Enlightenment, Bouliller's *Essai philosophique sur l'âme des bêtes* of 1728 (which furnished the basis for the abbé Yvon's article on the same subject in the *Encyclopédie*), and Condillac's *Traité des animaux* of 1755. As O'Neal's analysis shows, there were significant differences between Bouiller and Condillac regarding the role of "complexity," "necessity," and "hierarchy" in animal minds. But the upshot of their books was similar, the continuity of animal nature and human culture suggesting an extension of egalitarian values beyond humankind itself. What amounts to the first part of *Changing Minds* then concludes, appropriately enough, with an analysis of the famous theory of "climate" in *De l'esprit des lois*. What better emblem of the sunny disposition of the early Enlightenment than Montesquieu's picture of the fundamentally harmonious interaction of human communities with their various natural environments?

It was precisely this sense of continuity between nature and culture that dissolved away, as the French Enlightenment moved toward its maturity after mid-century. The chief agent of the dissolution was of course Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Still more inclined than Voltaire to distinguish sharply between nature and "civilization," Rousseau also decisively reversed their valences, now using the former to pass judgment on the moral and political failings of the latter. In the first of two chapters devoted to Rousseau, O'Neal returns to the very early play *Narcisse*, which already singled out *language* as the prime mover in the

transition from the natural to the civil state. From there, he turns to one of the key topics of Rousseau's social thought, that of "wealth," exploring three different sides of his handling of the topic: its impact on individual lives, as suggested in the fragmentary *Discours sur les richesses*; on social groups and stratification, in the *Discours* on inequality; and on the community of the nation as a whole, as glimpsed through the remedies sketched in *Du contrat social*. Firmly rejecting any "totalitarian" reading of the latter, whose politics were more conservative than radical, O'Neal argues that Rousseau's social thought nevertheless did contain certain "seeds of revolutionary zeal," whose fruits were to be seen, not so much in the Terror, as in the acts of creative—"symbolic"—destruction visited on such monuments of the Old Regime as the Bastille and the Grand Château at Chantilly. The final chapter of *Changing Minds* also extends from the Old Regime to the New, this time on the terrain of science. Why were the considerable diagnostic advantages of the percussion of the thorax ignored for nearly fifty years after their discovery in 1761 by the Austrian physician Leopold Auenbrugger? The explanation, O'Neal suggests, lies in the late triumph of sensationism, which undid a tenacious knot of prejudices about the relation of body and mind, in a final demonstration of the capacity of emancipated thought to change minds and lives alike.

By the time of Corvisart's translation of Auenbrugger's Latin into French in 1808, however, the Revolution had opened a chasm between nature and culture far deeper than anything dreamt of by Voltaire or Rousseau, which was then rendered well nigh permanent by the triumph of Romanticism. *Changing Minds* concludes with a brief, melancholy coda. Looking back over the century that separated Du Bos and Corvisart, O'Neal suggests that it is possible to discern the outlines of a tale of intellectual and moral progress, in and through the various conjugations of "nature" and "culture" on display in his case studies. This is indeed, as promised in the introduction, a more positive "dialectic of enlightenment" than that of Horkheimer and Adorno, all the more attractive for the subtlety and sobriety with which O'Neal traces its workings. But the creative tension between Voltaire and Rousseau at its center proved to be unsustainable. Calling it "one of the most impressive visual representations of this cultural conflict I have ever encountered in any artistic medium" (189), O'Neal pays tribute to Ettore Scola's film *La nuit de Varennes*, whose most vivid scenes depict frontal collisions between proxies for Voltaire or Rousseau. The author argues that the contradiction between the aristocratic high culture represented by Scola's Casanova and the exuberant naturalism of his student revolutionary has yet to find any resolution two centuries later. He ends with a gesture, not in any Frankfurt direction, but towards the likes of Philippe Labro and Ivan Rioufol, the latter lamenting the "*tyrannie de l'impudeur*" of today's culture of narcissism. Happily for us, this is far from O'Neal's last word on the subjects at hand. Admirers of his careful scholarship can now turn to the successor to *Changing Minds*, *The Progressive Poetics of Confusion in the French Enlightenment* (University of Delaware Press, 2011), whose addition of Diderot and Sade to the mix promises some tantalizing new twists to the Enlightenment's dialectic.

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