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Anton M. Matytsin and Dan Edelstein, eds. *Let There Be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. 304 pp. Illustrations, bibliographic references, and index. \$54.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781421426013.

Review by Chad Denton, Independent Scholar.

Birthered from a 2014 conference at Stanford University, *Let There Be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality* is an essay collection that strives to summarize the ways in which traditional narratives about the Enlightenment (and, for that matter, the Counter-Enlightenment) have been interrogated and complicated by recent scholarship. Anton M. Matytsin and Dan Edelstein center the essays around the metaphors of “light,” “truth,” and “darkness,” with much of the emphasis from the essays on investigating how these concepts were contemporaneously invoked in the development of our familiar myths of a “century of lights” in which the darkness of ignorance was dispelled. As Matytsin and Edelstein explain in their introduction, these essays seek to “acknowledge the dramatic ways in which recent scholarship has transformed the traditional view of the role of religion in Enlightenment discourses, but they also elaborate on the complex ties between faith and reason” (p. 6).

In examining how the relationship between faith and reason during the Enlightenment era was complementary rather than adversarial, Matytsin and Edelstein conclude that the “light” of the Enlightenment was thought of as reforming religion as well, and not simply banishing religion in favor of secularization. To support this assertion, Matytsin and Edelstein draw heavily on Alan Charles Kors’s thesis that atheist doctrines emerged out of post-Reformation theological disputes rather than from a separate tradition of free thought and dissent. I was disappointed that there were not at least references to writings by, for example, Nicholas Davidson, John H. Arnold, Georges Minois, and Federico Barbierato that argue for multiple discourses of religious dissent and unbelief that can be traced back well before the emergence of the “new science” of the latter seventeenth century and emerge out of scholarly encounters with pre-Christian classical texts or comprehensive responses to anti-clerical sentiment, cross-cultural and cross-denominational encounters, and even individual experience.^[1] After all, as Barbierato points out in his broader argument for a continuity of unbelief that bridges the pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment eras, “...it is fairly obvious that the theoretical opportunity to deny God is implicit in the very statement that He exists”.^[2] Admittedly, critiquing an essay collection for not including an essay the reviewer would have wanted is the most facile criticism to make, but still I would say the collection’s overriding theme would have been strengthened by the inclusion of at least one contribution directly addressing a continuity of unbelief outside elite theological debate that may (or perhaps may not have) influenced the more “mainstream” currents of the

Enlightenment. At the very least, the debate should not be considered cleanly settled, as it is in this volume's introduction.

Still, as much as this quibble inspired me to take my highlighter to a couple of pages in the introduction, it is to the book's credit that, despite this disagreement, I am delighted to have this collection in my library. In the first part, "Lux," Howard Hotson's "*Via Lucis in tenebras: Comenius as Prophet of the Age of Light*" examines why the Czech philosopher and educational reformer Jan Amos Comenius was banished from the canon of the international Enlightenment, largely by Bayle. It was not because he was conservative in his theology but rather because he associated with "millenarians and spiritualists" (p. 48). Anton M. Matytsin's "Whose Light Is It Anyway?: The Struggle for Light in the French Enlightenment" delves right into the metaphor of a "century of lights," finding it was tapped into by diverse philosophical and religious thinkers and not simply by those we think of as the philosophes. This analysis is complemented by the next essay by Céline Spector, "The 'Lights' before the Enlightenment: The Tribunal of Reason and Public Opinion," which "aims to locate the emergence of a consciousness of the age in the eighteenth century—a consciousness that preceded the development of the formal discipline of the philosophy of history" (p. 87). Building on, to some extent, Craig Koslofsky's invaluable *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*, Darrin McMahon shows how the expansion of street lighting in early modern Europe was intertwined with the promotion of the concept of a "century of lights".[3]

Concluding with McMahon's interesting merging of the material with the history of ideas, the conclusion moves on to "Veritas." Jo Van Cauter very much delivers on the promise of a kind of slaughtering of sacred historiographical cows promised by the introduction by linking Spinoza's theology to the early Quaker movement in "Another Dialogue in the *Tractatus: Spinoza on 'Christ's Disciples' and the Religious Society of Friends.*" Philippe Buc's contribution, "A Backward Glance: Light and Darkness in the Medieval Theology of Power," demonstrates how a deeply rooted dichotomy of darkness and light embedded in Christian theology was adapted by the canonical philosophes and even later critics of Christianity. Matthew T. Gaetano's "Lumen unitivum: The Light of Reason and the Aristotelian Sect in Early Modern Scholasticism" and Dan Edelstein's "The Aristotelian Enlightenment" both investigate how intellectual threads usually relegated strictly to medieval history continued to inform the Enlightenment. In the final section, "Tenebrae," William J. Bulman's "Secular Sacerdotalism in the Anglican Enlightenment, 1660-1740" suggests that the Enlightenment was, rather than being broadly anti-clerical, more concerned with reforming religion for the purposes of civic order and social betterment. Jeffrey D. Burson's "Refracting the Century of Lights: Alternate Genealogies of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Culture" proposes differing, but interrelated strands of thought about the "century of lights" among Jesuits, skeptics, and anti-philosophe figures (although why this essay was not included in the "Lux" section instead is unclear). Through writings about the self, "self-ownership" (p. 249), and altered states of consciousness, Charly Coleman in "Enlightenment in the Shadows: Mysticism, Materialism, and the Dream State in Eighteenth-Century France" further challenges the stability of the Enlightenment binary between the rational and the mystical. Lastly, James Schmidt's "Light, Truth, and the Counter-Enlightenment's Enlightenment" examines how ostensibly "Counter-Enlightenment" figures such as the English artist James Gillray employed very similar imagery of the "light as truth" against "darkness" in attacking Jacobins.

The introduction highlights how this collection seeks to illustrate the ways in which faith and reason were interrelated. Despite my earlier quibble, I would say it very much succeeds. Further, this collection also asserts stronger and more complex continuities between medieval thought and the Enlightenment, making it worth noting for not only specialists in early modern history, but more broadly scholars of religion and ideas in pre-nineteenth-century Europe.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Anton M. Matytsin and Dan Edelstein, "Introduction"

Howard Hotson, "*Via lucis in tenebras*: Comenius as prophet of the age of light"

Anton M. Matytsin, "Whose light is it anyway?: the struggle for light in the French Enlightenment"

Céline Spector, "The 'lights' before the Enlightenment: the tribunal of reason and public opinion"

Darrin M. McMahon, "Writing the history of illumination in the *Siècle des Lumières*: Enlightenment narratives of light"

Jo Van Cauter, "Another dialogue in the *Tractatus*: Spinoza on 'Christ's disciples' and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)"

Philippe Buc, "A backward glance: light and darkness in the medieval theology of power"

Matthew T. Gaetano, "Lumen unitivum: the light of reason and the Aristotelian sect in early modern scholasticism"

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William J. Bulman, "Secular sacerdotalism in the Anglican Enlightenment, 1660-1740"

Jeffrey D. Burson, "Refracting the century of lights: alternate genealogies of Enlightenment in eighteenth-century culture"

Charly Coleman, "Enlightenment in the shadows: mysticism, materialism, and the dream state in eighteenth-century France"

James Schmidt, "Light, truth, and the Counter-Enlightenment's Enlightenment"

NOTES

[1] Nicholas Davidson, "Atheism in Italy, 1500-1700" in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005); Georges Minois, *The Atheist's Bible: The Most Dangerous Book That Never Existed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Federico Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop: Inquisition, Forbidden Books, and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

[2] Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop*, 88.

[3] Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's empire: a history of the night in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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