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### Alan Charles Kors. Editor in Chief. *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment.*

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**Alan Charles Kors, Editor in Chief. *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; 4 vols.**

Compiling an Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment is bound to be a hazardous and somewhat problematical task.

In the first place, the Enlightenment—conceived as a period in European intellectual history — is itself, of course, closely associated with an, or *the*, *Encyclopedie*. This encyclopedia has a long and informative article by Raymond Birn on that one, although it is one that takes rather too little account of the scope and the purpose of the project. We could, for instance, have been told more about D’Alembert’s own perception of the place of his and Diderot’s enterprise within a history of philosophy, which suggest a far more radical break with the 17th century - and with Descartes in particular – than most historians of the Enlightenment have registered. (Nor is there anything about it in the all-too-brief, and overwhelmingly biographical account of D’Alembert by Dennis F. Essar.) It is not insignificant that for D’Alembert the Encyclopedia was intended to be not the moment of philosophical rupture with the past, in the way that the *Discours* did with Scholasticism; it was also meant to “do for our century and the following ones what...our ancestors failed to do for us,” that is, to provide a precise account of all human knowledge, “*les science humaines* whose advancement was what constituted the true course of “Enlightenment”.

The Encyclopedia may have begun, as Birn reminds us, as an expanded version of Chambers’ Cyclopaedia. It became, however, a map (the analogy is D’Alembert’s own) for a new kind of scientific undertaking.

Then, of course there is the troubling, and much disputed notion of Enlightenment — more problematical still, The Enlightenment. Is this *only* a period in historical time? In which case, was it the same in, say, Germany as it was in France or England? Are the same philosophical languages being used in both Copenhagen and Edinburgh? Or is it, as Horkeimer and Adorno claimed, something far *closer* to an intellectual process to which all human cultures are susceptible?

Curiously, despite the mass of literature on this subject, and, liveliness of the current debates in and around the topic, this Encyclopaedia has no entry under “Enlightenment.” It does have one on *Aufklarung*, on the dubious grounds that “of all the variants of the Enlightenment, only the German one took up the *Enlightenment* itself as a problem.” It also has an excellent, piece by Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob entitled

"Enlightenment Studies," which ranges from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, from Shaftsbury to John Pocock. This ends appropriately with the hope that the new *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment* will herald a new era of endeavors to reassess the significance of one of history's defining moments."

The hope is probably, alas, unlikely to be fulfilled since this *Encyclopaedia* in the words of its editors "simply offers the best of contemporary scholarship and an open-minded presentation of competing theoretical constructions of the Enlightenment." This it does very well. But the modesty of the ambition places it closer to the predecessors to the *Encyclopedia - Chambers' Cyclopaedia*, the Yverdon *Encyclopedie* and the *Deutsche Encyclopedie*, which Frank A Kafker, in his article on "*Encyclopedias*," aptly describes as seeking to "spread some of the advanced thought of the century" throughout Europe, without seeking to "transform the idea and institutions of a people."

As perhaps with all *Encyclopaedias*, the articles on individual authors, particularly those on major thinkers, are all too brief and schematic to do much service to their subject. Victor Novo gets barely four pages to deal with Locke. Far too much of this precious space is taken up with a discussion of Locke's relationship with the Earl of Shaftsbury. Although we are told that the *Essay on Human Understanding* and the *Two Treatises* are "among the most influential philosophical works ever written," we are given very little sense of what was so striking about these texts and why they should have had the enduring influence which they did. Anyone who wants to understand that would be best advised to go to Diderot's article on Locke in *Encyclopedie*. Entries on Kant, Hume, and Diderot himself are equally scanty.

Having said that, however, most of the articles are of a very high quality, and although the *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment* is rarely deep or innovative, it is certainly wide ranging. True, the traditional centers of the Enlightenment - France, Britain, Germany - receive more attention than anywhere else; but that is because they remain, despite decades of revisionist scholarship, *the* centers. But Naples, Valencia, Milan, Madrid, Lisbon, Dublin, Saint Petersburg, and Stockholm are also represented. There are articles not merely on the more celebrated Italians, such as Vico and Beccarla, but also on Genovesi and Filangieri. Not only are the Spaniards Campomanes, Jovellanos, and Feijoo present (if only fleetingly), but also one of the Enlightenment's most radical

and interesting creatures—Simon Bolivar—and his fellow Venezuelan, the essayist Andros Bello.

There, however, are some odd omissions. There is for instance no article on “Sentiments” or “Sentimentality,” although there is one (by David J. Denby) on “Sensibility,” and an excellent entry on “Sociability” by Daniel Gordon, which cover a small portion of the same ground. Yet not only does sentimentality play a major role in most Enlightenment thought, from Shaftsbury to Rousseau, it is also the subject of considerable contemporary interest, and some very distinguished scholarship. There is no entry under civilization, yet this is the period which saw the coinage of the term — probably by Mirabeau pere in 1756, although Adam Ferguson might have prior claim. Wilhelm von Humboldt gets an entry, but not his brother, the equally important, and in his day far better know, Alexander.

No work of this scope could ever hope to satisfy every reader. The day of the *Encyclopedie* as Diderot and D’Alembert conceived it is long since past. Such compilations today serve either as easy introductions to vast and complex subjects, or as the first of the modern encyclopaedias, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which soldiers on still—useful works of reference. *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment* serves both these functions extremely well.

——— Anthony Pagden