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Introduction

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and
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ORIGINS AND CONTEXT

This volume is a result of a Woodrow Wilson Center project on the place of religious thought, and thought about religion, within the broad field of American intellectual history. It is the companion book to *Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life*, edited by Michael J. Lacey, which comprised a selection of essays originally presented at a Wilson Center symposium by prominent authors from sectors of the academy normally aloof from one another and seldom engaged in public conversation. The participants were, on the one hand, cultural and intellectual historians from university departments of history and American studies and, on the other hand, theologians, church historians, and philosophers of religion from the seminaries, divinity schools, and those curious academic hybrids, departments of religious studies.

That prior volume was concerned with scholarship on elites and religion, particularly with how to make sense, in terms of both continuity and change, of the ethos of the higher learning in America that had developed under the influence of the rise of the modern research university beginning in the late nineteenth century and at the expense of the displacement of the clerical elites and theologically informed styles of thought that had dominated higher education from its colonial beginnings through the early part of the present century. The essays were attempts to trace the outlines of an appropriately complex picture of the contemporary situation.

The collection was intended to raise new questions about the lack of strong historical evidence for what was generally presumed to be a thoroughgoing secularization of academic culture, and to shed new light both on the dominant naturalist tradition of thought, which finds itself opposed in principle to all forms of thought that assert the existence of a supernatural or transcendental realm of being, and on neglected forms of religious modernism. The essays dealt, among other topics, with the history, achievements, and problems of the academic study of religion in American universities over the past century; with the cultural and institutional roots that contributed to the intellectual marginalization of American Protestant theology; with the search for objectivity and the corresponding ethics of belief that inspired the scientific challenge to religion in modern America; with John Dewey and the Niebuhr brothers as different but broadly representative types of intellectual aspiration; and with the reasons why, for those who concede its legitimacy (a problem here for naturalists), the practice of theology is necessarily so different from the practice of other scholarly disciplines.

Discussions that occurred during the project's first conference made clear the need for another one to pursue with more focus and in more depth some of the subjects that emerged as neglected but especially promising. First among these was the historical dynamism of the exchange between inherited secular and religious traditions of thought; it virtually suggested itself as a multifaceted theme rich in implications for deeper understanding of contemporary culture that merited rethinking. The roots of American naturalism and the interplay between different forms of naturalism and forms of religious modernism also surfaced as topics requiring fresh scholarly attention.

These were the origins of the present book. To establish a framework for reconsideration of the variable but dynamic interplay of secular and religious thought in the American heritage, we chose as a convenient starting point the concerns manifest in the pervasive contemporary critique of reason and rationalism—that is, the widespread sense of disappointment regarding yesterday's naive dreams of reason (so prominent in the cultural debates of recent years)—and attempted to deepen and extend its range of reference by some historical probing and recollection. Such probing might reach back indefinitely, but the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century provided a familiar and conventional context in which to begin. For although the Enlightenment, at least in its American guise, cannot be said to have inaugurated secularity of a naturalist type (the radical skepticism of the eighteenth century was notoriously feeble

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in America, and even Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson were devout in the rather old-fashioned manner permitted by their deism), it *did* register a new cosmopolitanism that brought into prominence those forms of natural theology from which the systematic philosophical naturalism of the post-Darwinian period would descend. Accordingly the 1990 symposium—from which most of the chapters that follow are derived (two of the chapters were designed subsequently to round out the coverage of the volume)—was addressed to the relations between knowledge and belief in America, where, with a necessary minimum of ambiguity, the term *knowledge* encapsulates the challenge presented by the secularizing cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and where the term *belief*, despite its cognitive elements, symbolizes religion.[1]

Taken together, the two volumes constitute an original contribution to the interdisciplinary study of American religion and intellectual life. This book gathers for the first time a variety of scholarly approaches to the relationship between the Enlightenment and the religious heritages, and in doing so presents new questions and perspectives. Note should be taken of the particular timeliness of this effort. In the first place, the end of the Enlightenment has been announced by some prominent critics who consider rationalism a failing foundation for modern morals,[2] yet we have here a set of authors from distinct and even opposed viewpoints who conclude that the announcement is premature. This pronouncement is nearly parallel to the frequent declaration of the deterioration of religion over the past two centuries and even the occasional eulogy; yet we find religious activity flourishing everywhere we turn. It is so evident in the fundamentalist resurgence in the politics of nations that even the most cloistered academics have been unable to ignore it any longer.[3] The

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[1] The essays solicited after the conference are those by Henry Samuel Levinson and Jacob Neusner. Although pragmatism was a concern of several of the contributors to the first volume, we could not skip by the movement which in both its naturalist (Dewey and Santayana) and its supernaturalist (James and Royce) sides brilliantly displays currents of our concern with knowledge and belief, and thus Levinson's essay. Nor could we ignore the overriding importance of the Jewish contribution to the practice and assessment of the Enlightenment, and thus Neusner's piece on Enlightenment historicism.

[2] Richard Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985). See also Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[3] See the first volume of the University of Chicago's Fundamentalist Project, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); there are five more volumes in the series. See also William M. Shea, ed., *The Struggle over the Past: Fundamentalism in the Modern World* (Lanham, Md.: Uni-

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Enlightenment persists and religion persists, and nowhere more than in the United States, that most religious and most modern of nations.[4]

A second oddity is that we read complaints in books that are read widely and hear in loud voices that can scarcely be said to cry out from the wilderness that religion has been denied a place in the public forum.[5] The "resurgence" of evangelicals in American politics, the beginnings of a "return" of religious intellectuals to the academy, and the "rebirth" of religion in the public forum now seem in continuity with the historical experience of the American people, who, with varying emphases, have managed to keep the Enlightenment heritage and the religious heritage in relation to one another. Here we present a collection of scholarly essays that bear the conviction that the heritages have been intertwined since the colonial period; evidently, neither has flagged.

The scholarly nature of the chapters, however, should not hide the fact that in dealing with the relations between knowledge and religious belief our authors are handling hot wires. Whereas on the campus of the research university the most radical political and philosophical views have become so familiar and conventional as to attract little notice, the acknowledgment of even the most orthodox religious views sometimes seems to require an attitude of cultural daring. Live currents are involved. We are dealing with one of those complexes of issues that call on the deepest intellectual and spiritual convictions of scholars, and debate over the ethics of belief can engage serious personal and professional commitments that appear as much in carefully maintained silences as in vigorous exchange. Our intellectual culture remains profoundly divided over what responsibilities are attached to the intellectual life, what to believe and what is believable, how belief is or is not knowledge, what is and is not fruitful subject matter for public discourse, and what the future ought to bring to reason and faith.

The gaps that divide religious and secularist academics are wide indeed. Although little is known about the religious views of modern ac-

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versity Press of America, 1993) for studies of fundamentalism in world religions, in American Protestantism, and in American Catholicism.

[4] See Andrew Greeley and Gregory Baum, eds., *The Persistence of Religion* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), and Andrew Greeley, *American Catholics since the Council: An Unauthorized Report* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1985); see also George Gallup, *The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), and idem, *Religion in America: 1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[5] Richard J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984). See also Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

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ademic scholars in the social sciences and the humanities (far less, for example, than is known about their political orientations), it is nonetheless broadly evident that religious and secularist scholars do constitute two easily distinguished communities in the academy, that the two factions rarely communicate directly and publicly, and that, in spite of their obvious relish in discussion at the occasional symposium, inertia may outweigh even the joys of new communication. The communities of religious faith have made a return to the academy of late, but the academy is still marked by a profound suspicion of the role of religion in scholarly and scientific life and the place of the religious intellectual in the academy.[6]

Part I of this volume surveys the relationship of the Enlightenment and religious traditions in America. In Chapter 1, James T. Kloppenberg, a leading authority in the field of American intellectual history, surveys recent historical literature on connections between the secular and religious in the nation's public life from the colonial era to the present. He traces the development of an American style of postfoundationalism in the writings of William James and John Dewey and argues that both the secular and the religious are compatible with the uncertainties and sense of limits that followed this tradition of thought. In Chapter 2, Giles Gunn examines the interplay of the legacies of Enlightenment secularism and religious conviction in American literature. He traces the fading of both, but particularly the decline or increasing opacity of Enlightenment motifs, associated with liberal republican ideals of freedom, autonomy, individualism, and rationalism—all of which have fared badly under the gaze of twentieth-century criticism, wherein they came to be seen as elements in the apparatus of cultural complacency.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 take up the historical relations between the Enlightenment and the nation's three main religious traditions—Protes-

[6] See George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). The argument in the American Academy of Religion (AAR) between scholars of religious studies and scholars of theological studies over the place of theology in the study of religion in the American university and over the theologians' active participation in the AAR continues unabated, with periodic reheatings. There are currently substantial numbers of Catholic and evangelical scholars who form interest groups under AAR auspices. In 1992 the presidential address defended the presence of theologians while several other AAR members questioned it. See Ray Hart, "Theological Studies in American Higher Education: A Pilot Study," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (Winter 1991): 715–827.

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tantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. In Chapter 3, Mark Noll, a leading authority on the history of American religion, reviews in succinct form the best known of these histories, the trajectory of American Protestantism, and does so from the point of view of critical evangelical Protestantism. He examines the Protestant embrace in all its complexity of many of the procedures and assumptions of eighteenth-century rationalism and traces out many of the cultural ironies—secularism with a lack of confidence—that followed the consequent blurring of distinctions between Enlightenment and religion. Patrick Carey presents a lesser-known history, the story of American Catholicism's encounter with the Enlightenment ethos, and provides an essay that opens up the subject for new consideration. Carey offers an account of Catholic attempts to struggle with their own selective appropriations of Enlightenment values and emphases from the apologetics of the early eighteenth century through the phased and multilayered elaboration of the twentieth century's neo-Thomist revival. In Chapter 5, one of this century's greatest scholars of Judaism, Jacob Neusner, examines the conflict between the secular and religious senses of time and treats the Enlightenment's secular rationality, with its reading of time as linear, cumulative, and progressive, as a substitute for the time sense inherent in the teleology of revealed religion. Although Neusner does not address the particular historical experience of American Judaism, he confronts a problem common to all religions in their relations to secularity, and from his thirty-year immersion in the sources he offers a recovery of the Talmudic sense of time as something quite distinct from the time sense of the Enlightenment historian.

Part II turns to selected thinkers, writers, and shapers of the American cultural tradition, from Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin through Wallace Stevens and T. S. Eliot. In Chapter 6, John E. Smith, one of the nation's most distinguished philosophers of religion and the editor of the papers of Jonathan Edwards, conveys the complexity and surprising freshness, when properly formulated, of the two poles by treating Edwards and Franklin as representative figures. Stanley Cavell, an influential master of Emerson studies, approaches one aspect of the troubling legacy of the Enlightenment by taking a new look at Emerson's paradoxical statement that freedom is necessary, and he elicits some of the implications of the fact that Emerson's key essay on freedom—"Fate"—which makes no reference to slavery, appeared just months before the Fugitive Slave Law. In speculating deeply and connectively on

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the ironies involved in this juxtaposition, Cavell provides an exemplary postmodernist rendering of an outstanding Enlightenment figure.

In the next chapter, the relation Lincoln had to both secular and religious currents of thought and his attempt to meld them into a faith are treated by Andrew Delbanco, a distinguished student of the Puritan heritage and its aftermath. Henry Levinson places three of the great originators of and contributors to American pragmatism, William James, George Santayana, and John Dewey, in a critical relation to the Enlightenment via comparison with the thought of perhaps its most influential philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Finally, in Chapter 10, literary critic Denis Donoghue continues exploration of the theme by asking again whether Christianity is compatible with Enlightenment thinking, and, if it is, or might be, whether it is still Christianity. Not likely, it seems to Donoghue; he develops his response by comparing two representative figures of the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens.

Part III differs in character and tone from the previous sections of the book. Its chapters are brief and schematic, not scholarly essays in the traditional sense. They are derived from the 1990 symposium, where each played a specific, preassigned role. The authors, two of the nation's most distinguished theologians and one of its most prominent neopragmatist philosophers (Schubert Ogden, David Tracy, and Richard Bernstein, respectively), were asked to provide the systematic outlines for discussion of the question—posed for them with an eye to the efforts in recent years to find a common term for what some critics believe to be a new cultural era—of whether in any deep sense the Enlightenment can be considered to be superseded or over. What can be said in contemporary terms of the living elements in the Enlightenment heritage, particularly with reference to their relation to the living elements in modernist religious thought? The authors' answers provide thoughtful, carefully measured insights into the balance among the traditions and the ongoing interplay between them.

To provide a more precise sense of context for reading the chapters that follow and to draw out some of the interrelations among them, we next comment on the terms of reference for the conference from which the chapters were derived. The conference was organized around three questions: What is the Enlightenment in America? Is it over, and if so, what now? What have been and are the relations between religious belief and the Enlightenment in America? The conference papers and the present book reflect the controlling position of these questions, and although

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the papers are organized differently in this volume, we follow the three questions in our introduction.

WHAT IS THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN AMERICA?

The authors were asked not to stray from the subject of the Enlightenment and religion in America. No one was asked to take on the systematic task of defining the Enlightenment or religion, but the first term was discussed ad hoc by most and the latter by a few. Renderings and emphases differ. While Peter Gay's Enlightenment makes its appearance, so too does Carl Becker's; Ernst Cassirer and Isaiah Berlin enter the discussion as well. If any one view dominates the discussion it is clearly Henry May's, for his helpful distinctions with regard to the identifiable strands and phases of the American Enlightenment tradition seem to have become close to common property.[7] Most of the many available options in interpretation and definition of the Enlightenment are present: the rise of individual autonomy over traditional community, the rise of secularizing reason over inherited authority, the disengagement of nature from a supernatural worldview, the rise of methodical and institutionalized criticism, the rise of science as both technique and worldview, the rise of historical consciousness and the practice of historical method, and the establishment of bourgeois institutions and a democratic ethos in public life.[8]

Each contributor takes one or another of these options, more or less nuanced, and proceeds to work with it. Some authors, however, hold that the tale of the Enlightenment as a historical movement is so complex as to defy normative definition, whereas others either argue or lean toward the view that the Enlightenment is essentially a matter of affirming the role of critical intelligence in evaluating the evidential basis of all claims to truth. Ogden states the case for criticism in this way:

> How, in a normative sense, is the Enlightenment to be understood? My answer to this question, which I consider crucial to my argument, is this: the Enlight-

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[7] Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[8] For a discussion of many attempts at definition, see Robert A. Ferguson, " 'What is Enlightenment?': Some American Answers," *American Literary History* 1 (Summer 1989): 245–72. For an excellent survey of the Enlightenment in America and its impact on religion, see John Corrigan, "The Enlightenment," in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, ed. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 2:1089–102.

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> enment is to be understood normatively as the consistent affirmation of the unique authority of human reason over all other putative authorities. By *human reason* I mean our capacity not only to make or imply various kinds of claims to validity but also, and above all, to validate critically all such claims as and when they become problematic by appropriate kinds of discourse or argument involving appeal in one way or another to common human experience.

The sharp edge of this view allows Ogden to do what the views of others—though they tend toward his own analysis—do not permit, namely, to count the more ambiguous features of the Enlightenment as adventitious or merely descriptive rather than normative. Richard Bernstein, for example, agrees that the Enlightenment is criticism and that the Enlightenment is not what its current enemies claim it to be (totalism, universalism, voluntarism), warning against questionable definitions that ignore the internal ambiguities of the Enlightenment. In contrast David Tracy and Patrick Carey, although they acknowledge the primacy of what Kant called the "critical path," also recognize the factors that make the Enlightenment a multifaceted cultural force—an ethos shaping a host of ideas, prejudices, assumptions, and practices. Mark Noll affirms the Enlightenment to be a methodology, an epistemology, rather than merely an ethos. John Smith's careful evaluation allows him at once to set up an essential contrast between the Enlightenment heritage and the religious heritage on the nature of evil and to find that aspect of the religious heritage—a concern with the reality of evil—present in the views of Franklin, Peirce, and James, as well as in the representative of the religious heritage, Jonathan Edwards. Smith also locates the Enlightenment heritage in the attitude of Dewey and the Enlightenment "belief in the salutary effects of the diffusion of knowledge to all mankind," a view as central to the "cosmopolitan" character he discovers in the thought of Jonathan Edwards as it is to Dewey's faith in education.

Stanley Cavell, though the only participant who does not address the topic of the Enlightenment as such, offers Emerson as a representative type of it; this "founder of American thinking" by his "performance" defines the American Enlightenment for us as freedom grounded in a thinking that is "on the side of God" and no other side, a partisan of itself alone. Perhaps we can take that as Cavell's definition of enlightened reason. Cavell worries at length over the ambiguity of reason in its performance: Are there matters over which reason cannot remain "on the side of God" but must become partisan? Could truth require taking sides? If so, then Emerson may also be an "ideal type" of the moral

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collapse of the Enlightenment understanding of reason, for Cavell is troubled by Emerson's silence regarding the Fugitive Slave Law in the essay "Fate." He wonders whether Emerson's philosophical flight beyond human squabbles is an evasion of moral responsibility, and he is clearly troubled by the possibility that textual evidence links Emerson, through Nietzsche, to Heidegger, casting a shadow over Emerson's achievement. Whatever may be the case, it seems that Cavell himself stands on a side, namely, that enlightened intelligence is autonomous reason, freed from the chains of traditional beliefs and practices, as displayed in Emerson's "Divinity School Address."

The list continues. No matter whether the author finds that the Enlightenment is fatally flawed (as do Donoghue and Neusner), or in need of significant pruning (as Carey, Noll, Smith, and Tracy suggest), or in need of internal correction (as Bernstein, Gunn, and Levinson maintain), nearly all the participants find the Enlightenment to be a passel of interrelated and overlapping, but distinguishable and even separable, concerns, interests, assumptions, and conclusions.[9]

It remains that Ogden's articulation of the Enlightenment's normative principle as the insistence that authorities support their claims with evidence, and the recognition that reason finds itself obliged to assess that evidence and live by its conclusions, is the best and clearest statement of the intellectual achievement of the Enlightenment and the point at which its failures begin to become evident.

The institutionalization of that principle of criticism in science, in universities, and in public life and the espousal of it by religious communities mark the vast cultural changes that have occurred in the West since the late seventeenth century. Of course, human beings have always questioned—else nothing would have changed—yet now change runs on before method. Peirce uttered a version of the imperative of the Enlightenment: "Do not block the path of inquiry."[10] Likewise, Bernard Lonergan argued an even broader version of it in his transcendental imperatives: "Be attentive! Be intelligent! Be reasonable! Be

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[9] Perhaps Isaiah Berlin, as Gunn suggests, said it best. See Giles Gunn's essay herein (Chapter 2), particularly note 10, where he discusses the special merits of Berlin's recent essay on Joseph de Maistre. In his discussion of the bitter contempt felt by de Maistre for the bland, naturalistic optimism of the philosophes, Berlin has summarized cogently the basic elements and connectives of the Enlightenment worldview that sparked such hostility in one of its preeminent adversaries. Berlin's presentation of the underlying credo of the philosophes, which Gunn quotes at length, is the finest in recent literature.

[10] C. S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. J. Buchler (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 54.