Robert Wokler
Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies, ed. Bryan Garsten.
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Before his death in 2006, Robert Wokler sought to collect some of his seminal essays on Rousseau and the Enlightenment and publish them in one volume. Wokler authored only two monographs, one based on his doctoral thesis and the other a brief introduction to Rousseau's thought, but he edited many collections. Hence much of his most significant work took the form of journal articles and book chapters. Unable to complete the task of compiling these pieces, he asked Bryan Garsten to realize this project. To Garsten's credit, this volume of 15 essays successfully represents Wokler's formidable interdisciplinary interests in Rousseau and Enlightenment thought while also reflecting both his erudition and his consistent perspective on the significance of the Enlightenment for our times. For both Enlightenment scholars and readers unfamiliar with Wokler's work, this book nicely conveys his invaluable contributions to Rousseau and Enlightenment scholarship.

Underlying virtually all of his writings as represented in this volume is Wokler's view that Enlightenment thinkers, and Rousseau in particular, must be interpreted in light of their interdisciplinary interests and approaches. Thus Wokler argues that the contextualist approach which has come to dominate scholarship in the history of political thought is 'too narrowly political in focus'; he takes issue particularly with the tendency of its practitioners to isolate 'the various languages of politics they address from other discourses – from anthropology, psychology and the philosophy of music and language, for instance, just to name certain themes of particular interest to me' (128).

Wokler's more holistic approach is well-represented in the chapters focusing on Rousseau. In 'Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures' Wokler integrates Rousseau's moral philosophy and his anthropological theory, arguing that Rousseau made important contributions to the field of anthropology, ones that still merit scrutiny. In 'Rousseau on Rameau and Revolution' Wokler argues that Rousseau's stance toward revolution – particularly the French Revolution – should be examined in light of his views on music and Rameau in particular, rather than simply the *Contrat Social*. Wokler also links, in a later chapter, Rousseau's reflections on providence and history to his assessment of political economy. And in the longest chapter in the book, 'Rousseau's Two Concepts of Liberty', Wokler distinguishes two conceptions of liberty in Rousseau's thought – natural and moral freedom – in order to refute the common view of Rousseau as someone hostile to freedom. This latter portrayal is only possible 'against a canvas from which the widely shared conceptions of liberty he inherited, employed, and refined before the advent of liberalism, have been wiped out' (157). The liberal critique of Rousseau largely arises out of a failure to recognize the pedigree of Rousseau's neoclassical conceptions of liberty and a false attribution of the excesses of the French Revolution to the influence of his ideas.

Even from these chapters, we see two major features throughout Wokler's scholarship which are suggested by the title of the book. First, Wokler was concerned to situate Rousseau in his intellectual context and reflect on Rousseau's legacy by comparing Rousseau with his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. Despite the relative lack of direct reference to Pufendorf in Rousseau's works, Wokler argues in an essay devoted to 'Rousseau's Pufendorf' that much of Rousseau's opus was 'quite centrally designed to challenge Pufendorf's natural jurisprudence, to the extent that it gave warrant to what Rousseau judged was the miserable history of human society and the despotic establishment of state power' (95). Rousseau's critique of Pufendorf points to the eighteenth-century thinker's advocacy of participatory democracy over and against representative forms of government, which for Wokler evince the divergence between Rousseau and the French Revolutionary Terror. Wokler further distinguishes Rousseau's thought from Voltaire's in a succinct but thoughtful piece reprinted from the *Times Literary Supplement*, showing how these two great figures of the Enlightenment – despite the shared targets of their attacks, including superstition, dogmatism, and despotism – nevertheless disagreed vehemently on religion, society, and human nature. And Wokler's 'Rousseau and Marx' usefully establishes the 'striking conceptual similarities between' the two critics of bourgeois society (219), while championing Rousseau's focus on language and culture in human affairs over Marx's reductive focus on the economic substructure of history and Rousseau's moralistic outrage over Marx's supposedly scientific recognition of the necessity of capitalism. Wokler is struck by the fact that, 'in the light of these differences … it was Marx who was the revolutionary, while Rousseau always counselled restraint' (231). In this fruitful comparison and contrast between Rousseau and Marx – which, however, overlooks the often cloying sentimentalism and nostalgia in Rousseau's writings – Wokler thus reiterates the gulf between the thought of Rousseau and the French Revolution.

Second, Wokler's study of Rousseau is at the core of wider concerns over the legacy of the Enlightenment. Unlike many contemporary Enlightenment scholars such as J. G. A. Pocock who argue against the idea of a single, unified Enlightenment, Wokler stresses the common features which allow us to speak of *the* Enlightenment. Thus in a chapter on the significance of the 'grand tour' for Enlightenment culture, Wokler draws out the international and cosmopolitan outlook (at least as regards Europe!) of the civilization of the Enlightenment. The 'universal rights of man long advocated by proponents of cosmopolitan enlightenment', writes Wokler in an essay on the 'The Enlightenment and the French Revolutionary Birth Pangs of Modernity', should be sharply distinguished from the destructive power of nationalism in the wake of the French Revolution: 'the abuse of human rights on the part of nation-states which alone have the authority to determine the scope of those rights and their validity' (213). Thus, despite his agreement with Hegel's overall characterization of the post-Enlightenment era, Wokler takes issue with Hegel's view that the French Revolution was an outgrowth of the Enlightenment and Rousseau's political philosophy in particular.

On this basis, the last chapters of this volume are devoted to Wokler's thoughts on the Enlightenment's legacy in the mind of its proponents and detractors. Wokler writes movingly of Ernst Cassirer's 1932 work *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* as an exemplary presentation and defence of the Enlightenment against the forces of irrationalism which were engulfing Cassirer's Germany. Wokler turns to Isaiah Berlin's important work on Counter-Enlightenment thought, asserting his former mentor's essentially Enlightened perspective notwithstanding Berlin's

'embarrassing … invention of a monolithic Enlightenment project' which has unduly influenced critics of Enlightenment thought (250). Taken together and in light of earlier chapters, these two essays reflect Wokler's nuanced reading of the Enlightenment as both a unified intellectual movement and one with diverse, often competing strains within certain shared parameters. Wokler has little patience, then, with Alasdair MacIntyre's assault on 'the Enlightenment project' in *After Virtue*: its account of Enlightenment thought is 'wonderfully confused, both in method and substance, generally and in detail' (267). Perhaps in an attempt to resurrect Cassirer's debate with Heidegger, Wokler savages MacIntyre for holding the Enlightenment 'to blame for some of the most sinister aspects of a morally vacuous civilization, cursed by the malediction of unlicensed Reason' (261). Instead, he concludes, the 'moral chaos of the modern world stems not from the failure of the Enlightenment Project but from its neglect and abandonment' (278).

Despite the plurality of subjects addressed, and the fact that the chapters were originally published over a span of thirty years, the volume admirably manifests both the clarity and coherence of Wokler's ideas as expressed in extremely well-written prose. One might object that Wokler's defence of the Enlightenment is at times overly polemical, insufficiently taking into account some of the darker aspects of Enlightenment thought such as its at best ambiguous relation to imperialism and questions of race in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the volume itself might have benefitted from either more explicit thematic groupings of Wokler's essays or a chronological presentation so as to show the development of Wokler's thought and scholarship from the 1970s to the twenty-first century. But it may very well be the case that the overlapping concerns and themes in Wokler's pieces would not easily allow for such forms of organization. Overall, Garsten is to be applauded for collecting in one volume important essays by one of the most eloquent defenders of Rousseau and the Enlightenment in recent times.

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