Jesús Astigarraga, ed.,
The Spanish Enlightenment revisited

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There is no doubt that this essay collection, edited by Jesús Astigarraga, is an important and timely book. It faces and tries to correct the lack of interest with which most of international scholarship has regarded the Enlightenment in Spain, when it does not deny its very existence. Unfortunately, and rather alarmingly, given the necessary internationalism of historical research, and the cosmopolitanism which was a central feature of the movement itself, many Enlightenment scholars are blissfully ignorant of, and blind to, studies which are not concerned with those countries which have been traditionally considered the true core of Enlightenment, or have been recently added to the Enlightenment canon (France, Britain, the Netherlands); at most, they have developed some interest in the so-called Enlightenment "peripheries", both colonial and Eastern European. This is further aggravated by two simple truths, not always admitted but which this essay-collection acknowledges; one the one hand, many British and American scholars don't read academic contributions which are not published in English; on the other hand, Spanish scholars, up to recent times and with some exceptions, have not made enough efforts to internationalize their research, and have not often published their works in other languages other than Spanish.

Astigarraga and his team set themselves to the task of explaining to an English-reading audience not only what was, in essence, the Spanish Enlightenment, but also and more crucially, what about the general Enlightenment can be learnt from the Spanish case and from the ways scholars of eighteenth-century Spain have dealt with it. In Astigarraga's words, what are "the beneficial effects that the economies of scale [the book] contains will bring to the study of other national cases" (p. 4). Those questions are answered in convincing ways by the editor's introduction and by the volume as a whole. Indeed, learning about the Spanish Enlightenment is neither a question of exoticism, nor of political correctness: it is absolutely necessary in order to have a fuller and more precise notion of what the Enlightenment, as a general intellectual and cultural movement, was. The fact that a prestigious academic institution specializing in eighteenth-century studies like the Voltaire Foundation has recently started to include works on Spain and its empire in its series *Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment* (including Rebecca Haidt's last book on clothes' production and display) is a welcome indication of change in this sense.

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The contributions to the book come from the expert hands of a well-chosen selection of specialists, most of them historians, but also Law and Literature scholars; a majority of them Spaniards, but also, in two cases, coming from Britain and Italy – a much reserved recognition of what scholarship of eighteenth-century Spain owes to the work of foreign Hispanism (also French and American). Many of the essays, and most particularly some of them, exemplify what Pimentel rightly call the "spirit of homologisation" which, for a number of historiographical, intellectual and political reasons, has dominated Spanish scholarship on the Enlightenment in the last decades. There has been and still is a strong need (and a strong wish) to stress that Spain had indeed its own version of the Enlightenment; more generally, that in historical terms the famous slogan "Spain is different" (a popular touristic reclaim of the 1960s under Franco's regime) is not true, and Spain is not any more "different" than other countries with their own particular histories, their own "national", "regional" or "local" varieties of the Enlightenment, always within the general framework of European and Western history. As perceptively pointed out by historians like many of the ones contributing to the volume, who were born around the 1960s and therefore came of age intellectually under democracy, the fact that while postmodernist dismissal of the Enlightenment was in full bloom in Britain and the USA, Spanish historians tended to vindicate their country's modernity is understandable, given the rapid normalization which the country experienced during the 1970s and 1980s. That does not mean that Spanish historiography is unaware of general, historiographical debates on the Enlightenment, with which it increasingly engages in critical dialogue. If it is true that Spanish scholarship in general has lacked, and still lacks, internationalization, the best among several generations of Spanish scholars (some of whom are contributors to the volume) certainly have been and are an exception to that rule, and younger ones are increasingly present and articulate in international fora. The emphasis is now perhaps not only in proving that Spain did have an Enlightenment, but in finding better ways of analyzing it which can help to revise our idea of the Enlightenment itself.

This book and the windows it opens into recent and stimulating research -but also other perspectives not present in this collection- are an example of the critical engagement of some of the best Spanish scholarship with international historiographical debate on the Enlightenment, brilliantly represented in the editor's introduction. Based on his own and solid personal contribution to the study of eighteenth-century political economy, Astigarraga's opening pages are thoughtful, authoritative and immensely useful. They contribute greatly to give the volume as a whole coherence and purpose, and to connect it with some of the main issues over which international scholarship on the Enlightenment has been pondering and debating in recent times.

Some of the essays are particularly clear about the need to revise and problematize many of the assumptions of earlier scholarship, which tended to use Spain as a "counter-example of the Enlightenment" (p. 3). The editor's introduction,

as well as chapters by Gabriel Paquette and Juan Pimentel (explicitly the former; implicitly the latter), are incisive explaining how scholarship on the Spanish, or Hispanic, Enlightenment has benefited from (and at the same time, contributed to) the renewal of Enlightenment studies, through different and complementary perspectives. Greater attention to national and local varieties and contexts; stress on transatlantic, imperial dimensions; concern for forms of circulation (including translation), understood not as passive reception or imitation, but as active adaptation, hybridization and cultural transfer; interest in the practical, utilitarian dimension of Enlightenment, and a less teleological view of the connections between Enlightenment and revolution are some of the ways in which both Spanish and international scholarship on the Spanish Enlightenment have proved useful to help develop more satisfying ways of understanding the general Enlightenment, by asking general questions which have to be answered from always specific, particular historical, local, national and imperial contexts. For example, Gabriel Paquette offers a useful overview of historiography on Enlightenment, reformism and the end of the Old Regime in the Hispanic territories, with a particular emphasis on the connection between reforms and the crisis of the Spanish empire. His survey brings no surprises to Spanish scholars, who have been dealing for a long time with general historiographical questions such as the relationship between Enlightenment and absolutism, but will offer food for thought to scholars who have debated such questions, without taking into due consideration the Spanish case. In his turn, Juan Pimentel elegantly poses the critical question of how modernity is defined. He analyzes how the cliché of Spanish backwardness was configured in early modern times -both as a self-image and as an exterior perception-, and revises some of the crucial contributions of the Hispanic empire to modern, global science, later erased from historians' attention and awareness with the emergence of a particular, reductive notion of modernity.

The book covers some of the areas of research most fruitfully developed in the last decades, and some of those which are at the forefront of current inquiries. More specifically, it emphasizes two of them. Firstly and above all, political economy, the editor's field, and one which has been conclusively proved by scholars such as John Robertson to be one of the main concerns of the Enlightenment: in Javier Fernández Sebastián's phrasing, "without a doubt one of the brightest light of the age of Enlightenment" (p. 214). Chapters like the one contributed by Astigarraga himself, and also the one written by him in collaboration with Niccolò Guasti and Juan Zabalza, as well as Javier Usoz's chapter, deal with it from different and complementary points of view, which include the contribution of political economy to the birth of the public sphere, eighteenth-century sociability around the so called "Economic Societies of Friends of the Country", and debate on public finance. The second area of study privileged is law, particularly constitutional law (in the chapters by Ignacio Fernández Sarasola and Joaquín Varela Suanzes-Carpegna, respectively on enlightened constitutional projects previous to the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz, and on the

reception of the model of the British system of government in eighteenth-century Spain), but also penal law (chapter by Alejandro Agüero and Marta Lorente on penal Enlightenment and the reception of Beccaria). Other areas covered throw interesting light on several aspects of eighteenth-century culture and thought. The study of the "public sphere" from a conceptual angle is undertaken by Javier Fernández Sebastián; eighteenth-century science is the subject of a brilliant chapter by Juan Pimentel; the republic of letters is surveyed by Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos in his contribution, and the much discussed, multi-faceted issue of connection between culture and politics is expertly dealt with by María Victoria López-Cordón in a chapter which does justice to the complexity of that question.

Certainly, all these subjects are absolutely relevant and important. However, they represent a particular choice within the wider landscape of Enlightenment scholarship. The volume is presided by a clear methodological option, well explained by its editor from the beginning, which privileges the vantage point of intellectual history, with certain concessions to cultural and political history. As a result of that explicit choice, and also of some other, implicit ones, certain important aspects of research into Enlightenment thought and culture, including some burgeoning fields of enquiry, are found to be almost completely absent. One of them is a gender perspective, including two distinct, yet connected fields of study which have been intensively developed and produced seasoned results in the last three decades. On the one hand, women's experience of, and participation in, the process of Enlightenment; on the other hand, attention to how gendered categories, notions of femininity and masculinity, were reconfigured by a society wishing to stress its modernity and integration in Europe. Women are mentioned in passing in two of the essays, and their social, cultural and political roles in eighteenth-century society (more specifically, queenship in the Bourbon court) are only considered in a third essay. Gender debate is difficult to ignore, as it was pervasive and omnipresent in many fields of eighteenth-century culture and thought: from visual culture, to popularization medicine; from economic reforms to literature. Several monographs, collective works and many essays published in Spanish and other languages (including English, but also French, Italian and German, among others) have researched into this rich intellectual and sociocultural material; of this scholarship, only four titles are mentioned in the book's final bibliography, excluding, for instance, one of the contributors, María Victoria Lopez-Cordón's own path-breaking, numerous and fundamental essays and books. The absence of a gender perspective is telling, as international research from that angle has already started to make an impact on general overviews of the movement (see for instance *The Enlightenment world*, edited by M. Fitzpatrick, P. Jones, C. Knellwolf and I. McCalman in 2003), and contributions by Spanish scholars have significantly helped to configure the field. Perhaps, if, as Astigarraga and Pimentel rightly complain, Spanish scholarship is still insufficiently internationalized, those scholars who have managed to make their research internationally visible in different specialized academic

areas (including political economy, science history and gender studies, among others) still have to develop stronger synergies.

Connected to, but not reducible to, the lack of a gender perspective, other dimensions of Enlightenment ideals and practices are not taken into consideration, and the whole question of the relationship between public and private—between the emerging "public sphere/s" and the building of domesticity, intimacy and notions of self—is absent from the volume. This includes, for instance, the question of sensibility, a classic issue in eighteenth-century studies, now refashioned by recent interest in the history of emotions. The choice to privilege the perspective of intellectual history might also explain why the question of Enlightenment as discipline is implicitly omitted, possibly as one connected to a completely different notion of Enlightenment than that which the authors of the volume share. It is true that, when brought to extremes, this perspective, deeply influenced by a Foucaultian or a Frankfurt-school bias, can ultimately be sterilizing and take to a postmodernist view of the Enlightenment not only theoretically rigid, but seldom supported by empirical, fine-grain analysis. However, when taken not as orthodoxy but as a guiding, malleable notion, ready to be reconfigured and combined with other perspectives, it can be, and has been, stimulating and productive. Many facets of Enlightenment culture, such as its aesthetics (literary, artistic, visual), its relation to "popular" and colonial culture(s), its strong pedagogic and civilizing dimension, its power to shape normative notions of the self, of emotions, sensibilities and relationships, can be better visualized and understood by incorporating notions like that of discipline, education (in its broader sense) and distinction. Including some of those questions might have offered a wider and more varied perspective of the (Spanish) Enlightenment, one which would have considered also its shadows.

These reservations do not diminish the merit of this excellent essay collection. What remains crucial is that there was certainly a need to "revisit" the Spanish Enlightenment from the perspectives of current scholarship for an English-reading public. Those who have understood it and found a way to collectively address that need should be complimented not only for doing it, but also for the intelligent, elegant way in which they have undertaken the task. Any historiographical perspective on the Enlightenment is necessarily partial; any choice of a particular view implies exclusions, and there is no such thing as a comprehensive, complete, conclusive and final assessment. The editor of *The Spanish Enlightenment revisited* is aware of that when he declares that his aim is "not [to revise it] exhaustively" (p. 4), but to offer "a showcase" of recent and interesting approaches. There is no doubt this essay collection manages to do so. It pays an immensely useful and enlightening "visit" to the Spanish Enlightenment: one of many possible interpretations. Its authors, and particularly its editor, should be praised for this very important achievement. The time is ripe for further collaboration and cross-fertilization between different, innovative and creative approaches to the Spanish Enlightenment.