

Wolfgang Schmale, *Gesellschaftliche Orientierung: Geschichte der "Aufklärung" in der globalen Neuzeit (19. bis 21. Jahrhundert)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2021). 379 pp.

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In this book, Wolfgang Schmale sets himself the task of carving out a global history of 'the Enlightenment' (*die Aufklärung*) in the modern period. As he explains, the book deals with the history of a discursive construct resulting from debates on the eighteenth-century Enlightenment that have taken place since the nineteenth century. Certainly, as Schmale observes, a singular history of 'the' Enlightenment cannot be written. Rather, a collection of entangled histories is called for. Nonetheless, the book builds on the premise that most people associate the Enlightenment with democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and this can be examined as a phenomenon of global consequence.

The problem of defining the Enlightenment – which is all too familiar to historians of the eighteenth century – must, of course, be present also in a study of the Enlightenment's heritage. Indeed, 'the Enlightenment's' chronological, geographical and ideological limits are at least as elusive as those of the eighteenth-century movement itself. The great aim of Schmale's book is, however, to bring a diversity of worlds of discourse and practice close enough to permit an overview. While this would already give issue for many enlightening comparisons, Schmale has an even more profound aim. As he suggests, in the twenty-first century 'the Enlightenment' has such an unprecedented global presence that the persistence of debates about it legitimates the application of Karl Jaspers's Axial Age (*Achsenzeit*) theorem to describe the situation. This is discussed in detail in the conclusion of the book.

Between the introductory part and the conclusion, Schmale's study is divided into five main chapters: 'Namensgebung', 'Praktiken', 'Intellektuelle', 'Kritik', and 'Orientierung'. In terms of length, the chapter entitled 'Intellektuelle' outweighs the rest, since it takes up almost one third of the book. Proceeding by examining

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how the Enlightenment has figured in the writing of prominent authors, Schmale works through a list of nearly 30 intellectuals from Hegel and de Staël to Foucault and Jonathan Israel. Moreover, in the following chapter 'Kritik', these names are complemented by critics such as Hannah Arendt. As such, the book offers a thought-provoking journey through selected landmarks of modern intellectual history. However, owing to the repetitive nature of the author's procedure, the subchapters liken an encyclopedia with cross-references.

In the section 'Orientierung', Schmale takes a different approach. Instead of reviewing the works of individual authors, he presents big data figures sourced from Wikipedia and Google Trends. The aim is to single out those proponents of the Enlightenment ('Aufklärer\*innen') who attracted most interest globally between the 1 July 2015 and the 3 June 2021, from the beginning of the Wikipedia statistics until the date when they were last accessed. As Schmale explains, persons who may draw interest for reasons other than the Enlightenment – such as the Founding Fathers of the United States – were deselected from the list. Yet regarding Newton – who emerges as the most popular name – one might ask the same question: Do we know that interest in Newton corresponds with interest in the Enlightenment? The other names on the top five are Kant, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Locke.

To this reader, the most enjoyable chapter was the one entitled 'Praktiken', in which Schmale spotlights agents who have made '*the* Enlightenment' function as societal orientation (gesellschaftliche Orientierung) both in Europe and in other parts of the world. By the term 'orientation', Schmale means that the construct of '*the* Enlightenment' has been used, taught, explained, simplified, appraised, critiqued, and contested to the extent that it has become an ever-present intellectual and societal process. As such, it can be described as a permanent debate about the historical phenomenon.

In the chapter 'Praktiken', this debate is thus comprehended as something more tangible than keywords like rationalism, progress, and liberty. After discussing the construction of knowledge in early-modern Europe, Schmale moves on to global history, asking how to write entangled histories that would do justice to the global reach of practices of Enlightenment. An interlude entitled 'Beethovens Neunte' introduces the idea that the Enlightenment did not really end in the early nineteenth century, even though it was already historicized by the 1820s. Weaving the early modern and the modern period together, Schmale then touches on e. g. the European integration and decolonization, concluding that unlike at present, in the middle of the twentieth century the Enlightenment was conceptualized as an instrument of resistance.

Overall, the book provides plenty of food for thought. The statistics deliver a welcome change of perspective to discussions of historical theory, even though, as

Schmale readily admits, they represent but a first attempt in this line of research. Whether or not the reader finds the argument about the Enlightenment as another Axial Age convincing, the book recommends itself as an ambitious attempt to reconsider the different ways in which the heritage of eighteenth-century philosophy still influences the global present.