

analyzing the politics of space in the families and households of tradespeople. She argues that control of and access to space were important indicators of household status and one's relationship to the household head was the most important indicator of control and access. Diaries reveal that access to the parlor or the dining room table were the most coveted spaces.

This book has much to offer family, social, economic, cultural, and urban historians. It is written in an accessible manner, although for a scholarly audience. Graduate students will find the digressions into historiography very useful. The only thing missing from this woman's historian's perspective was more evidence about tradeswomen, but historians of masculinity will find much here to mull over.

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MICHAEL BROWN. *The Irish Enlightenment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. 640. \$39.95 (cloth).  
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This work is an outstanding contribution to an ongoing debate over the nature and extent of the Enlightenment in Ireland. Michael Brown provides a synthesis and overview of the major currents in Irish intellectual life, including rare analyses of Catholic, Presbyterian, and Irish-language debates and including a striking range of literary sources. This wealth of material is marshaled to make the case for the presence not only of Enlightenment in Ireland, but of a distinctively *Irish* Enlightenment. This was shaped above all by the competing claims articulated by rival confessional communities to common standards of civility and rational inquiry.

A brief introduction announces the book as building on the "national" paradigm in the historiography of Enlightenment, established by Roy Porter and J. G. A. Pocock in the 1980s. Brown combines this perspective with the recent elaboration within Irish, British and American studies of a concept of "peripheral" Enlightenment located within an "Atlantic World."

Two sets of organizing categories structure the work. The first is chronological: Brown identifies "religious," "social," and "political" Enlightenments, covering the early, middle and later parts of the eighteenth century respectively. The second is more contentious: it is in Brown's terms, "methodological." Intellectual life in Ireland, he claims, was defined by conflicts between "scholastic," "empirical," and "rationalist" approaches to knowledge and the human subject. The presence of "empiricism" and "rationalism" in a given text is taken as proof of its "Enlightenment" sympathies. The "scholastic" alternative, by contrast, is defined as purely conservative: "scholasticism in all its varieties ... presumed the potency of preexisting authority" (9).

The first section of the book addresses the "religious" Enlightenment, reconstructing predominantly intra-confessional debates among Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Catholics. In the first chapter Brown argues that the early eighteenth-century Presbyterian subscription controversy was produced by the encroachment of "rational" and "empirical" approaches to the interpretation of scripture and the moral capacity of man. In the second he switches focus to the Anglicans, who sought to purify the communion of rationalist "freethinking" tendencies and develop historical justifications for its political hegemony. In the third he considers the embattled Catholic community. This was the least susceptible to heterodoxy, but anticlericalism and freethinking tendencies were perceptible at the margins. Its political stance became increasingly "empirical," however, as Irish Catholics sought to make a case for their utility to the Anglican ruling class.

In the second section of the book Brown explores more well-trodden territory: the "social" Enlightenment of political economy and associational life. Irish discourses of improvement,

Brown suggests in chapter 4, were neither colonial nor sectarian in inspiration, seeking instead to promote common standards of “civility” for an integrated Irish community. This was partially realized in the institutions of the “Enlightened counter-public”—the “unofficial” public sphere of coffee-houses, bookshops, and theaters that Brown meticulously maps in chapter 5, and the burgeoning associational life detailed in chapter 6. Brown offers a bullish account of the reach and integrative potential of these archetypal “Enlightenment” institutions, “in which inter-confessional sociability was acceptable practice, ideas circulated, and affective ties developed” (251).

The final section then examines the “politicization” and fragmentation of these nascent forms of Enlightenment sociability. With chapter 7 Brown identifies a developing concern with the gap between state and people in Ireland, across historical, antiquarian, and theatrical writings of the 1750s and 1760s. Chapter 8 revolves around the question of parliamentary reform, which split the “Patriot” Volunteer movement (itself a surprising outgrowth of the associational life of the “social” Enlightenment) into “rationalist” and “empirical” camps in the course of the 1780s. In the final chapter, provocatively titled “An Enlightened Civil War,” Brown details how the “middle ground” of Enlightenment was destroyed after the French Revolution by the polarization of these positions in debates over the legitimacy of the eighteenth-century Irish Kingdom.

In a short conclusion Brown then considers the legacies of Enlightenment for nineteenth-century Irish history. This revealed the mutation of a pre-Enlightenment conflicts over confessional “conformity” into a “modern” problematic of “social order.” Ireland “entered modernity with the rest of Europe in the eighteenth century” (464); its subsequent political and economic problems were products of that modernity, rather than mere atavisms.

As this summary suggests, this is a big book making big claims. These are sometimes difficult to assess. Individual texts are for the most part successively discussed then ascribed positions within Brown’s conceptual schema, rather than being connected to one another through sustained examination of specific debates or intellectual networks. This can make for some odd narrative choices: chapter 4 jumps repeatedly between the 1720s and the 1780s without much explanation, while the exposition of Edmund Burke’s 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (examined, frustratingly, instead of any of Burke’s writings on Ireland itself) is placed after chapter 9’s main narrative of the 1798 rebellion.

A definition of Enlightenment in terms of “methodologies,” meanwhile, risks being simultaneously too loose and too restrictive. The repeated discovery of “empiricism” or “rationalism” across diverse and decidedly un-philosophical genres can feel arbitrary or even esoteric. Yet by dismissing the Aristotelianism and “scholasticism” that connected Catholic Ireland in particular with the European continent, Brown still ends up casting Irish “modernity” in surprisingly closed terms.

The problem of “scholasticism” suggests, in turn, a broader limitation in Brown’s case for an Irish Enlightenment. We receive little impression from the book of how Irish ideas or institutions were connected to, or distinct from, those of Britain and continental Europe. A definitive argument for a coherent and nationally distinct “Irish Enlightenment” would need to address these questions, on the basis of comparative and transnational research. It would seek out Irish contributions to Atlantic and European debates, while painting a more nuanced picture of how the kingdom was regarded by Scottish and continental observers (there is more here than the notorious dismissals of David Hume and the *philosophes* cited by Brown in his introduction).

It seems unlikely, therefore, that Brown’s work will be able to settle the question of whether the fractured and porous intellectual life of the eighteenth-century Irish Kingdom should be rallied to the standard of an “Irish Enlightenment.” This wide-ranging and relentlessly interesting book is nonetheless a major achievement—one that will become an essential point of reference for scholars and students of eighteenth-century British and Irish history.

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