by Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, is a useful collection of essays which brings together essays representative of recent trends in American, British, French and German philosophy. This volume includes work by some found in Post-Analytic Philosophy (Rorty, Davidson and Putnam) as well as many whose work is referred to in the volume under review (including Derrida, Dummett, Foucault, Gadamer, Habermas, Lyotard, MacIntyre, Taylor and others).

University of Alabama at Huntsville
J. Craig Hanks


Kerry S. Walters defines deism as "a general philosophical orientation" (51). Walters further suggests a "nucleus of belief shared by all deists" which gave them a "distinct intellectual identity": conviction in an orderly, rational universe as well as rational benevolent deity, distrust of metaphysical speculation and scriptural authority, advocacy of empirical methodology, denial of the divinity of Jesus and triune God, confidence in human progress, and an emphasis on the utility of virtue (51). Walters also realizes that no definition can contain deism of all its forms. Deism is a term—like humanism or even puritanism—which is useful but plays tricks on the dead. Recent historians of humanism and puritanism have begun to use those terms carefully as "tendencies." They try not to force individuals into the definition: but rather of those who recognize compatibility with each other. Walters does us the service of editing a collection of writings from thinkers who recognized each other and shared core intentions.

Walters, the author of Rational Infidels: The American Deists (Wolfeboro, NH: Longwood, 1992), offers a perfunctory introduction on the rise and fall of deism which suffers from trying to paint with a roller what can only be done with the fine brush of an impressionist. The names of Bacon, Newton, and Locke are used liberally and Calvinism becomes "the unrelenting presence: in every American colony and sect" (16). The "distinctively egalitarian nature of American deism" is attributed only to French influence (25). In the introduction, Walters waivers between nuanced understanding of the complexities of deism and black/white characterizations of non-deist individuals, events, and movements.

The excellence of the book lies in Walter's chapter introductions and the sources he edited. The selections from Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson are well chosen. The pragmatic heart of Jefferson's deism is clear in his advice to an orphaned nephew: "Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable nor for the rightness but the uprightness of the decision" (117-18). In another letter, Jefferson admits
the self-willed laziness of his anti-metaphysical bent: "I have for many years ceased to read or to think concerning [the spiritual realm], and have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent creator has made so soft for us" (118).

The dogmatic anti-dogmatism of Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine is also well represented, but the most useful part of the book is its second half which includes sections from lesser-known thinkers. Elihu Palmer is presented as the most active and intellectually creative and consistent American deist. Phillip Freneau of Jefferson's political circle was the best poet of the deist movement. Selections from the Compte de Volney's Ruins; or Meditations and the Revolutions of Empires are given a chapter since "no other continental contemporary of the American deists exerted a greater influence on them" (182). Walters is at his best at the end of the book introducing selections from the short-lived deist magazines The Temple of Reason and more popular Prospect; or, View of the Moral World, which were both heavily influences by Palmer and offer a window into the wide circulation of deist views at the turn of the century. The most interesting piece is a Thomistic proof for an infinite, benevolent, unitary creator written probably by the ex-Jesuit Dennis Driscoll. The short final chapter is devoted to The Theophilanthropist magazine which Walters uses to show how deism "fizzled out with a whimper by 1811" (358).

Walters, who also introduced and edited Elihu Palmer's "Principles of Nature" (Wolfeboro, NH: Longwood, 1990), knows well the deists and deism at the turn of the century. His two other recent books now joined by this volume are an important contribution to our knowledge of the lesser-known radical thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century who endeavored to spread the good news of deism in a new era of increasing freedom in the press.

Indiana University Southeast

Rick Kennedy


Levinson's book represents a valuable contribution to the ongoing study of the significance of George Santayana in the history of American thought. The author traces the development of Santayana's views from his student days at Harvard College through his mature philosophical reflections. But, what makes this interpretation intriguing is that Levinson asserts his own commitment to pragmatic naturalism and assesses Santayana's strengths and weaknesses as a pragmatic naturalist.

At the outset, Levinson characterizes in rough fashion the heart of the difference between Santayana and Dewey, the paradigmatic pragmatic naturalist, this way: