

## JOINING THE RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT: SOME THOUGHTS ON INTELLECTUAL IDENTITY, PRECARIETY AND SOCIABILITY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

Historians have for some time asked themselves whether the Radical Enlightenment refers to a cohesive radical wing of the Enlightenment, or whether it merely groups together a number of highly diverse strands of heterodox thought. At the same time, little attention is being given to the ways in which radical thinkers experienced and helped shape the intellectual contexts within which they operated. Although often viewed as isolated individuals, many heterodox, radical, and marginalized thinkers exhibited a keen concern to formulate their intellectual identities and define their place within intellectual landscape. However, the self-perception and self-styling this involved could take on many forms and meanings. In an effort to address these areas, this paper explores how various methods developed to express new intellectual identities and adherence to doctrines, schools of thought, or even concrete groups of thinkers gathered in sociable circles. Considering and applying ideas recently published by Martin Mulsow, and using the radical

thinker Johann Conrad Franz von Hatzfeld as a case study, will explore these subjects through the concepts of intellectual identity, the 'knowledge precariat', and sociability.

## 1. Introduction

If there is a holy grail in Enlightenment studies, it is this: to capture the full intellectual diversity of Enlightenment in a stable grid of concepts, and to explain its development through all of its many social, cultural and geographical dimensions, while avoiding the pitfalls of balkanization and reification. As the solution to this challenge continues to elude historians, responses to this problem have been varied, sometimes increasingly extreme. Some historians have doggedly continued attempts to capture the essence of the Enlightenment using present-day criteria, whereas others have suggested pragmatically abandoning the concept altogether, to focus on more rewarding research questions instead.

These problems recur in the discussions on the historiographical concept of the 'Radical Enlightenment', which, in the eyes of many historians, has encouraged idealist perceptions of an intellectual tradition that never had the degree of coherence or self-awareness often attributed to it.<sup>1</sup> Some historians now believe that there was no Radical Enlightenment as such, only various shades of heterodox

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob 2007, 29-35.

thought contributing to the slow, non-linear development of modernity. Although liberating, this view also has its problems, as the emphasis on diversity tends to reduce radical thinkers to more or less unique historical peculiarities, or to loosely associate them under metaphors of limited explanatory power, such as the 'crise de la conscience Européenne', or the 'diverse roots of intellectual modernity'.

As the debate on the unity and diversity the Radical Enlightenment continues, the matter may appear to be undecidable to many historians, but this need not paralyze further research, especially not when other approaches are available. Historians of science, for example, are increasingly turning towards a renewed history of concepts that investigates the changing meanings attributed in early modern times to labels such as 'rationalism' and 'scepticism'. These can be studied as markers qualifying various intellectual projects, and as markers indicating the meanings individual scholars' attached to what they were doing.<sup>2</sup> These historians thus hope to avoid not only the imposition of categories contemporaries would not have recognized, but also the dangers of an overly abstract, Whiggish account of the Scientific Revolution.

Similar approaches removing present day historiographical constructs in favour of 'actor categories' might be usefully applied to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual ferment

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<sup>2</sup> One example is the recently launched NWO-funded 'Thinking classified: structuring the world of ideas around 1800'.

known today as the Radical Enlightenment. How did thinkers we would qualify as radical or heterodox conceive of themselves? Did they have any sense of belonging to a larger, cohesive movement or school of thought, and how did membership of any societies or clubs influence these perceptions? What ways of ‘belonging’ were there, and what factors influenced individual’s decisions to adopt or reject the ideas we associate with the Radical Enlightenment? In what follows, I will develop some thoughts on the possibilities these lines of inquiry have to offer, in critical interaction with ideas recently put forward by Martin Mulsow, and using the natural philosopher Johann Konrad Franz von Hatzfeld (1686-after 1751) as an historical test-case.

## 2. Introducing Hatzfeld

Widely categorized in his own time as a deist or even “*cerveau brulée*”, Johann Konrad Franz von Hatzfeld’s outlook on the scholarly world in which he operated has been described by present-day historians as a strong but highly peculiar expression of Radical Enlightenment thought.<sup>3</sup> The same is true of many similar thinkers of this period, who have been viewed as unique, isolated individuals, who can be loosely associated with the Radical Enlightenment. The lack of intellectual coherence amongst these thinkers has often been perceived as an

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<sup>3</sup> Tortarolo 2005, 239; Wielema, 239.

indication that irreducible diversity existed across the board, that little or no sense of a shared project or identity could be found amidst the significant number of marginal thinkers active in Europe from the late seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth. At the same time, the stories of men such as Hatzfeld seem to challenge this view. For them, intellectual identity and belonging were particularly pressing issues in the struggle for recognition and patronage. However, before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the lines of inquiry that can be elaborated based on the elements mentioned above, some biographical details might be helpful.

Born around 1686 in the Nassau territory of Dillenburg, Hatzfeld revealed little about his youth and social background. Although details on his formal education remain unknown, Hatzfeld was by no means uneducated: he acquired French, English, and some knowledge of history and the natural sciences. His earliest known career was that of a lackey, serving several noble households in the Dutch Republic and Britain. This career brought him to London, where, in the early 1720s, he decided to dedicate himself exclusively to the sciences. At this point, he revealed a strong passion for the perpetual motion project conceived by Johann Ernst Elias Bessler, which had caused some controversy in the preceding decades. In the face of rising scepticism about this project at the Royal Society, Hatzfeld decided to develop a machine of his own, believing that success was very near: “For according to what Account we have of the Model, that Illustrious Prince [the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel], and excellent Encourager of all Arts and Sciences has in his possession of Dr Orfireus’s [Bessler] making, I am very well satisfied of

its being a real perpetual motion, as well as I am satisfied to be capable of making one my self.”<sup>4</sup>

Just as strong as his passion for the perpetual motion project was Hatzfeld’s distaste of Isaac Newton (1642-1727). Hatzfeld accused the latter of developing a worldview in which God was responsible for maintaining the operations of the natural world by defining motion as external to matter. Newton stood accused of other flaws as well, including the indefensible notion of the ether, the misinterpretation of the Bible and the execution of deeply flawed experiments. Finding it impossible to get a hearing at the Royal Society about his perpetual motion machine and other ideas, Hatzfeld wrote *The Case of the Learned*, which was published in 1724. In this treatise, Hatzfeld expounded his ideas on natural philosophy, restated his opposition to Newton’s worldview, but also sided with Leibniz on the issue of providence, paying special attention to the need to see the natural world as a creation functioning without direct divine intervention. To define it otherwise would be to deny human freedom and engage in “predestinism”, one of Newton’s main blasphemies in Hatzfeld’s eyes.<sup>5</sup>

In 1726, Hatzfeld left London. There is very little evidence about his activities after this point, although Hatzfeld later revealed that he had supported himself through his technical inventions and by taking jobs as an English tutor for the children of aristocrats. Only in 1741 did Hatzfeld

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<sup>4</sup> Hatzfeld 1724, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Hatzfeld 1724, 20-24.

turn up again, still carrying many of the same convictions. Travelling between Halle, Leipzig, Gotha and Berlin, he tried to secure subscriptions for a new treatise against Newton. Surprisingly, he managed to gain the support of Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and Johan Christoph Gottsched (1700-1760), spending over a year in the Leipzig area before moving on to the court at Gotha.<sup>6</sup> According to Johannes Bronisch, Wolff's decision to support Hatzfeld's new project stemmed from his own desire to generate opposition to the rising popularity of Newtonianism. Hatzfeld, who had already declared his support for Leibniz, must have appeared as a useful ally, although he would prove to be more susceptible to radical appropriations of Wolffian thought than Wolff and Gottsched had foreseen.<sup>7</sup>

After quarrelling with his supporters, Hatzfeld travelled to The Hague, where he arrived in 1745. There, to Wolff's surprise and horror, he published one thousand copies of his new treatise, which carried the title of *La Decouverte de la Verité et le monde detrompé a l'égard de la philosophie et la religion*.<sup>8</sup> The book, which purported to have Wolff's personal approval, restated Hatzfeld's earlier criticisms of Newton, but added a radical critique of organized religion, the Bible and the European political elites. Hatzfeld was especially scathing about the clergy, which he believed, had deliberately or through ignorance

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<sup>6</sup> Bronisch 2010, 237.

<sup>7</sup> Bronisch 2010, 319, 325-326.

<sup>8</sup> Hatzfeld 1745.

misinterpreted the Bible on a gigantic scale: “Et les ministres de l’Eglise sont d’autant plus mal avisés, qu’ils croient la Philosophie une Destruction à leur Profession pendant qu’en Effet elle est l’unique Moyen de la leur conserver, pourvu, qu’ils expliquassent la Bible comme il faut, sans quoy la Philosophie sera effectivement une Destruction à leur Profession, parce que de la manière qu’ils expliquent la Bible, il n’y a ni Rime, ni Raison, mais au contraire, elle en est remplie de Chimères, Absurdités, Contradictions et Blasphémies, qui [sic] sans doute la Philosophie les condamnera jusqu’au Fond de l’Enfer [...]”<sup>9</sup> So severe was his critique that Hatzfeld was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment in The Hague. After displaying signs of madness, however, his sentence was reduced to banishment and the public burning of his book. He reappeared in 1751, was briefly imprisoned again, and seems to have definitively disappeared from view afterwards.

Hatzfeld’s intellectual trajectory from a relatively moderate anti-Newtonian deism to a full blown critique of religion, church and state presents a challenge to historians of the Radical Enlightenment. On the one hand, Hatzfeld developed a unique worldview that put him well beyond both the respectable scientific world and his intellectually more coherent freethinking counterparts. Very much aware of his isolation, he sometimes portrayed himself as a lone enlightener, selflessly acting for the good of society. On the other hand, Hatzfeld very openly declared his ideological and intellectual preferences, expressing a clear

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<sup>9</sup> Hatzfeld 1745, 20-21.

sense of belonging to radical Wolffianism. In addition, he showed a high degree of discernment and ability in seeking out and dealing with influential men of science, courtiers and Walloon church clergymen whom he saw as his main audience. In spite of the incoherent nature of his writings, the impatient anger with which he greeted many interlocutors and even some signs of madness, time and again he managed to gain access to social environments not easily available to men of his standing. Hatzfeld thus oscillated between isolation - to some extent self-imposed - and inclusion. Gaining insight into how Hatzfeld related to his environment and explaining his motivations and interactions with the world as well as the origins of his radicalization is a challenge that cannot be met within the bounds of traditional intellectual history. To this end different lines of inquiry should be explored. In the following sections, precarious knowledge, intellectual identity and radicalization will be explored as possible avenues for further research, applying both to Hatzfeld and more generally to what is described as the radical wing of the Enlightenment.

### 3. Precarious knowledge

In his recent work, *Prekäres Wissen: Eine andere Ideengeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* Martin Mulsow proposes an interdisciplinary investigation of *precarious knowledge* during the early modern period. Distancing himself from earlier approaches, which have relied on a more traditional dichotomy of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, Mulsow claims that knowledge was precarious in three ways. First of all, the carriers of

knowledge, be they documents or oral tradition, were precarious in that they could be destroyed, lost or forgotten. In addition, knowledge had a precarious social status: heterodox or otherwise non-established knowledge carried the risk of marginalization, loss of social standing, and prosecution. Finally, knowledge claims were precarious because authors operating under conditions of censorship were forced to invent ways to mask the meaning of their statements and prevent their identification as authors, thus complicating the interpretation and reception of their ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Mulsow's approach focuses both on marginalization itself and the varying degrees of success individuals achieved through various strategies designed to counteract it. Thus, instead of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, he sees various forms of more or less precarious 'knowledges'. In order to explain the complexities of how marginalization worked, Mulsow proposes an interdisciplinary approach using visual evidence, the reconstruction of social networks, book history and the traditional tools of textual interpretation to explain the gaps between the author's intentions, the (strategic) way they were published, and the ways they were received by various audiences.

Exploring these gaps is a crucial step in determining how the *knowledge precariat* differed from what Mulsow defines as the *Wissensbourgeoisie*. Both groups were in principle subjected to the same

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<sup>10</sup> Mulsow 2012, 14-18.

risks, the main difference being that the knowledge bourgeoisie managed to secure protection from institutions and potentates while also operating more successfully within the conventions of the scholarly world. Thus, the difference between the two groups was not merely a matter of the orthodox or heterodox content of their respective convictions, but a complex interplay of contingent factors and choices that marginalized certain thinkers, forcing them to adopt various strategies to protect themselves and their knowledge. By keeping their more radical ideas strictly private, some heterodox thinkers managed to retain their respectability. Another, riskier strategy, was followed by writers who unabashedly published their heterodox ideas while insisting that there was an essential distinction between their public intellectual persona on the one hand, and the pious private moral person on the other. Still another strategy was that of the eclectics, who buried their own convictions beneath compilations of various heterodox ideas.

The history of the knowledge *precariat* is thus not simply a tale of how an intellectual underclass came into being as a result of the adherence to controversial ideas. Mulsow's work shows various individuals' trajectories toward precarity, each determined by different constellations of social and intellectual factors. Mulsow also emphasizes that the marginalized thinkers of whom he speaks were not a sociologically homogenous group. Instead, they were individuals from various backgrounds who were faced with great difficulties when disseminating their knowledge, and the isolating effects of precarity were such that few schools of thought or otherwise organized groups

can meaningfully be said to have existed. After all, marginalized thinkers had few ways of building up a public profile, or of creating a community of like-minded individuals.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it is precisely among marginal thinkers that one finds the most unique individual projects, whose sheer peculiarity often made infertile ground for the formation of schools of thought. Lastly, the complexities of the circulation and reception of marginal documents further inhibited the interpretation of the ideological message of marginal texts for contemporary readers.

Therefore, according to Mulsow, only scholars and publishers engaged in gathering and preserving rare or prohibited books were in a position to survey the development of marginal thought beyond the strictly local level. Their efforts enabled the production of reference works such as Johann Anton Trinius' *Freydencker-lexikon*,<sup>12</sup> which by compiling and categorizing large quantities of marginalia, created the impression that entire schools of heterodox thought were emerging across Europe. Mulsow maintains that most radical thinkers were themselves unaware of such larger structures, which were the result of reconstruction after the fact by far less isolated individuals, and never reflected the experience of marginal thinkers themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mulsow 2012, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Trinius 1759.

<sup>13</sup> Mulsow 2012, 41.

However, Mulsow's approach can be elaborated in a number of ways, including a closer examination of the role played by sociability in the diffusion and marginalization of precarious knowledge. Another is to review the continued problem of the marginal, heterodox thinker's intellectual identity and self-perception. If many marginal thinkers from the early modern period and early eighteenth century did not labour under the impression that they were part of an identifiable school, structure or ideological block, did this apply to all marginal, radical and heterodox thinkers throughout the Enlightenment period? And, even if this claim applies universally, how did radical thinkers conceive of the intellectual landscape, what structures did they see, and what sense or desire for inclusion did they exhibit? What changes can be observed in the ways adherence to certain doctrines and movements was expressed? Thirdly, there is the problem of radicalization: a much more sustained, systematic approach is needed to explain what drove thinkers deemed heterodox by their contemporaries to embrace ideas and doctrines that entailed marginalization, ridicule and even the risk of prosecution.

## 4. Intellectual identity

A considerable body of research exists today on intellectual friendships, correspondence networks, sociability, literary devices permitting

authors to hide behind various authorial personae, the formation of new intellectual movements, currents or disciplines, and even the “body of the scholar”.<sup>14</sup> Each of these approaches relies on different conceptions of the scholar’s identity, ranging from the abstract and textual to the sociological and even physical, and tries to trace how these aspects of the scholar’s identity developed over time.

Within Radical Enlightenment studies, however, the search for overarching structures and developments in intellectual identity and self-perception among radical thinkers is shied away from. Many historians agree with Mulsow that the variety, peculiarity and isolation of radical or heterodox thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries defies categorization. Moreover, there is a keen awareness of the slipperiness of labels such as ‘atheism’ and ‘Spinozism’, which were applied as polemical terms in order to discredit opponents, and therefore do not reliably indicate the presence of what they supposedly identified. Just as importantly, it has become clear that the atheists, Spinozists, deists, freethinkers and other heterodox writers who were active over the course of the eighteenth century were in many ways a motley bunch, which differed to an important degree from the radical coteries of the late seventeenth century. Thus, they frustrate attempts to construct taxonomies of intellectual identity and even efforts to define continuous lines of development, or a shared intellectual heritage.

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<sup>14</sup> Vila 2012; Smith 2004; Mori 1999.

Any proposal to reconstruct intellectual identities of marginal thinkers therefore faces the possibility that it will merely confirm the claim that there were no clearly identifiable schools of radical thought in the eighteenth century. But this is not necessarily the case. I wish to focus on a somewhat different kind of identity: the ideological, intellectual identities of the marginal thinker insofar as they were actively shaped by each thinker personally, and insofar as they translated into an attitude toward and awareness of the various ideological dividing lines structuring the intellectual landscape. Precisely for marginalized intellectuals, self-definition and the awareness of ideological dividing lines were essential when trying to influence the reception of their ideas and their social standing. As Ann Thomson maintains, the writers of “anonymous irreligious works were keen to show that they were part of both a long tradition and an international fraternity doubting Church doctrine, rather than being a few isolated individuals”.<sup>15</sup> While she also emphasizes the dangers of assuming clear intellectual dividing lines within irreligious thought, which was appropriated in complex ways throughout Europe, Thomson makes clear that freethinkers were keenly concerned to construct a well-defined intellectual identity – a concern that may not have been limited to freethinkers, especially within a polemical context.

Given this polemical context, an important part of self-definition was done negatively, by contrasting oneself with certain enemies.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomson 2013, 170.

Hatzfeld, for example, was very much concerned not to be perceived as an atheist, pantheist or Newtonian. For other thinkers too, rejecting certain labels and the intellectual and ideological agendas associated therewith was essential to the formulation of their own. Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) fought extensively to refute accusations of atheism leveled against him, not merely because of the opprobrium attached to atheism, but also because it clashed with his perceptions of his own project as a much more subtle, eclectic approach to philosophical and religious questions – an intellectual attitude for which he wished to be recognized. Thus, not all marginal and heterodox authors' attempts to distance themselves from the more controversial markers of intellectual identity can be read exclusively as strategies to protect themselves from precarity in Mulsow's sense. In many cases, they were stating their opposition to the convictions of others to make their own stand out more clearly.

Positive self-definition and even the naming of allies or like minded men also occurred implicitly or through explicit declarations of adherence ideas, doctrines or schools of thought. Adherence to an ideological group or body of thought was often expressed through such words as 'sectateur', 'partisan' or 'disciple', or through larger texts directly positing the existence of groups of ideological allies. For example, in the preface to his *Système de la Nature*, the Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach (1723-1789) addresses himself to what he calls "le petit nombre de partisans de la vérité, & des âmes honnêtes qui la cherchent

sincèrement”.<sup>16</sup> Further along in his book, in a chapter that explicitly asks “existe-t-il des athées”, he articulated what he understood atheism to mean and what positions had been wrongly labeled as such. He maintained that a small elite had in fact embraced true atheism, compared to the large numbers of the vulgar, superstitious and clerical.<sup>17</sup> Scholars tended to use terms such as “partisan” pejoratively to refer to adherents of wrongheaded ideas, but in d’Holbach we see them used in a positive sense, affirming the author’s adherence to a body of ideas that had a deeply precarious and controversial status.

One fruitful line of research would be to trace the evolution of the use of these (and comparable) markers, to determine whether and why they became more explicit over the course of the eighteenth century. This would yield insights into the evolution of the basic conceptual tools with which marginal thinkers perceived the intellectual landscape and positioned themselves within it. Part of this research could focus on the performative influence of such works as the *Freydencker-lexikon* and other genres of texts that wittingly or unwittingly drew the lines and categories structuring the intellectual landscape. Charles Alan Kors has already detailed the influence of religious training which aimed to reinforce young Catholic minds against atheist thinking, but inadvertently created well defined positions of atheism which were

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<sup>16</sup> d’Holbach 1770, preface.

<sup>17</sup> d’Holbach 1770, 321, 332-335.

later embraced wholesale by highly radical thinkers.<sup>18</sup> The tools of categorization and identification, initially employed by those who wished to distance themselves from radical thinkers, may very well have created the categories which were embraced by the very same people they were suppose to describe.

The baron d'Holbach, and as we shall later see, Hatzfeld, were both unusually explicit in expressing their adherence to definite ideological positions, but the self-perception of those heterodox thinkers who did not explicitly position themselves within the intellectual landscape is an equally legitimate subject, if more challenging. The degree and manner in which individual thinkers expressed their intellectual identity was moreover influenced by changing contexts. Explicit statements of adherence, for example, usually occurred in directly polemical contexts, beyond which presenting an explicit intellectual identity did not always logically follow from the situation. Even those thinkers who explicitly expressed adherence to certain ideas were not always telling the full story. Thus, it is necessary to use the full range of means available to the historian, including sociability, correspondence networks, possession of books, and various forms of biographical information.

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<sup>18</sup> Kors, 1990.

## 5. Sociability

If both the mechanisms making knowledge precarious and the strategies designed to cope with this precarity were inevitable features of the world of letters and scholarship, it makes sense to study them in conjunction with another feature of that world: sociability. As has been widely recognized, organized sociability played a major role in the dissemination and publication of knowledge, and also determined the value and status accorded to both texts and their authors.<sup>19</sup> The many forms of sociability in which the learned engaged therefore constituted another arena in which precarious knowledge was shaped, disseminated, protected or even exposed. Moreover, sociability deeply influenced marginal thinkers' self-perception and perception of the world by confronting them with a variety of worldviews with which to engage, inviting them to articulate their own views with greater clarity.

Some sociable circles were deliberately constituted as open spaces for sharing and shaping precarious knowledge. The *Chevaliers de la Jubilation*, operating in The Hague in the early eighteenth century, the informal group around Franciscus van den Enden in Amsterdam, the Collegiant gatherings in Rijnsburg and many others are all examples of sociable circles offering various semi-institutionalized platforms to knowledge and knowledge-carriers that would not have been acceptable elsewhere. Although these circles themselves were

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<sup>19</sup> Mijnhardt 1987; Goodman 1994; Lilti 2005.

confronted with the issue of precarity – many of them were forced to operate clandestinely – they offered a more or less secure environment, providing opportunities to exchange knowledge with like-minded individuals. These societies were no ideological monoliths and often were not concerned primarily with ideological coherence. But it was precisely because they had managed to create an internal culture open to ideological diversity that they could continually accept the presence, loyalty and even personal investment of individuals whose ideas would not have been welcomed outside.

But in what ways did belonging to circles of this kind contribute to the formation of individual thinkers self-perception and self-positioning vis-à-vis their intellectual context? No societies came with fully prepared identities, but some encouraged a high degree of personal commitment as well as the adherence to specific ideologies or bodies of ideas. As recent scholarship has shown, some Masonic lodges acquired a very specific ideological signature and social base.<sup>20</sup> Others did not, and proved permeable to individuals from widely differing backgrounds who joined for widely differing reasons. Important differences have also been found in the ways societies managed ideological and religious differences internally.<sup>21</sup> Given these varied, even contradictory findings, it seems likely that encounters in sociable contexts impacted self-perception and self-positioning in a variety of

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<sup>20</sup> Porset 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Porset 2006; Beaurepaire 2013.

ways, some of which were highly intensive and informative for the present day historian, and some of which were certainly not. For some heterodox thinkers, however, encountering groups of likeminded men, or even just men of various convictions willing to discuss ideas openly were deeply formative, sometimes loyalty-inspiring events.

Hatzfeld, for example, was deeply influenced by the *Aletophilenkreis* in Leipzig. Founded in 1736 by Ernst Christian Graff von Mantteuffel and Johan Gustav Reinbeck, the *Aletophilen* provided a platform of discussion and exchange in which ample space was given to thinkers who had moved well beyond the accepted boundaries of Lutheran orthodoxy. After spending its first few years in Berlin, the society moved to Leipzig in 1740, where Johann Christoph Gottsched was one of its core members. Predicated on the appropriation of Christian Wolff's oeuvre as a basis for the formulation of a more liberal frame of mind against Lutheran orthodoxy and pietism, it successfully gathered both moderate Wolffians and their more radical counterparts. In fact, as Gunther Mühlphordt, Martin Mulsow and others have found, some of the most significant radicals of the early German Enlightenment were present in this circle.<sup>22</sup> These "left-Wolffians" loosely based themselves on Christian Wolff's philosophy when developing their critiques of the Bible, Pietist and Lutheran orthodoxy and even authoritarian government.

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<sup>22</sup> Mulsow 2007, 20; Mühlphordt 1979, 237-253.

Having been introduced to this society and the surrounding network through the good offices of Christian Wolff, Hatzfeld gained access to a wider network that included Gottsched. For several years, Hatzfeld stayed in the Leipzig area, supported by both Gottsched and Manteuffel in an effort to counter the influence of Newtonianism.<sup>23</sup> To Hatzfeld, being part of this network offered not merely material support and patronage, but also considerable intellectual stimulus as well as a sense of belonging. This he expressed most strongly in the resulting book, which contains numerous references to the *Aletophilenkreis*' vocabulary on the love of truth (*Aletheia*). He gave it the title *La Decouverte de la Vérité*, chose the pseudonym Chevalier Veridicus Nassaviensis, and augmented his original anti-Newtonian argument from the 1720's with a radical deism that was very much in line with some of the more radical Left-Wolffians of Leipzig. The title page of the book, moreover, claimed to carry the approval of Christian Wolff himself. Thus, through his book, Hatzfeld very loudly proclaimed his adherence to the *Aletophilen* and to Christian Wolff, against the Newtonian worldview. He could hardly have given a clearer and more explicit expression of ideological awareness and intellectual identity.

The list of subscribers is another important feature of the book, which shows how Hatzfeld conceived of the intellectual landscape in which he functioned.<sup>24</sup> Although it is most unlikely that many of the

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<sup>23</sup> Bronisch 2010, 325-333.

<sup>24</sup> Hatzfeld 1745, cviii-cxx.

individuals listed had in fact subscribed to the book, or were ever even made aware of the possibility of doing so, the list can be seen as an enumeration of all those individuals whom Hatzfeld regarded as an important audience for his ideas. Thus, the it shows his orientation towards the international diplomatic community, the Walloon churches, the academic world and various heterodox groups in a limited number of urban centres. Alongside Mantteuffel, Gottsched, Wolff, Reinbeck and a various court officials, the list moreover contained many names Hatzfeld could only have known about by being thoroughly acquainted with the clandestine scenes of various cities on an axis from London to Berlin. Lambert Ignace Doux fils, postmaster and colporteur of clandestine books for the circle around Rousset de Missy in The Hague, was among those mentioned.<sup>25</sup> Lesser known individuals also appeared, including Jean Dubordieu, a London-based minister and author of a controversial treatise attempting to prove truth of the legend of the Theban legion. Another significant name was that of Francesco d'Algarotti, who had published *Newtonianismo per le dame* in 1737, and Francois Moreau de Maupertuis, president of the Berlin Academy of Sciences.

Hatzfeld's primary purpose in adding this list to the book was no doubt to boost the international stature of his work, but in including kindred spirits from radical circles, high profile personalities from various courts in Europe, and likely enemies such as Maupertuis, he also

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<sup>25</sup> Jacob 2006, 172.

revealed a keen awareness of the intellectual and political landscape in which he operated. If Hatzfeld positioned himself within this landscape as an anti-newtonian radical who was highly sympathetic to Wolffianism and very much enthralled by the sense of mission offered by the *Aletophilen*-ideology, he nevertheless desired the attention of the full community of the learned and the powerful. He tried to accomplish this not just through sociability and the list of subscribers, but by actively seeking out courtiers, professors and other men of note, with some degree of success.

Another aspect to consider in sociability is the larger category of (intellectual) friendship. Many marginal thinkers actively sought out friends and interlocutors whom they could trust. Hatzfeld, for example, singled out Johann Jacob Mascou as particularly good friend, alongside various other personalities of “cette charmante ville” Leipzig, including a Dr. Richter who became “un second Mascou”.<sup>26</sup> Other thinkers also became extremely attached to the social circles they frequented. Themiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, for example, expressed his sentiments about the circle of friends surrounding the *Knights of Jubilation* by telling a friend “you know that this has been my purpose during my entire life”.<sup>27</sup> Although it should be recognized that often, “dans ces réunions, la philosophie échappe a la taxinomie et a la typologie”,<sup>28</sup> marginal

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<sup>26</sup> Hatzfeld 1745, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob 2006, 156.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob 2007, 32.

thinkers valued the safety and interest of discussing their ideas with others, and some were clearly as committed to maintain these avenues of discussion as they were to pursuing their own projects.

Hatzfeld, then, could perhaps be described as a member of the knowledge precariat who was well aware of the ideological dividing lines structuring the intellectual context in which he operated, and concerned to clearly express his intellectual identity. Although Hatzfeld was unique in the vehemence with which he expressed his opposition to the “Newtoniens” as a clearly defined group and the explicitness with which he declared his support for Christian Wolff, he resembled other marginal thinkers in his desire to seek out allies while also continuing to interact with men of completely different convictions. Isolated and precarious though their situation may have been, heterodox and marginalized thinkers were not without an awareness of the intellectual landscape, and indeed were keen to belong to communities of like-minded thinkers.

Rather than persuading them to adopt less precarious convictions, these forms of sociability seemed to encourage marginal thinkers to develop their ideas further, and fostered a sense of connection to other thinkers, sometimes transcending ideological differences in the process. It is essential to learn more about how the experience of these discussions in social circles drove the formation of ideological self-awareness and self-identification. Hatzfeld’s case shows that many insights can be gained into the ideological awareness and self-definition of radical authors through the investigation of their attachment to circles of fellow heterodox thinkers, as revealed both in their writing

and in their sociable activities. While Hatzfeld's self-positioning was unusually explicit, studying other marginal intellectuals in this manner would greatly improve our knowledge of the evolution of intellectual identity among marginal thinkers, from the vaguest expressions of adherence to the formation of full-blown schools.

## 6. Reconsidering radicalization

Radicalization can be understood as the process by which certain thinkers increasingly distanced themselves from accepted or 'mainstream' positions to embrace radical ideas with ever greater vehemence, in spite of the dangers of persecution and ridicule. As I have touched upon in earlier work, the investigation of radicalization processes might generate some useful insights into how and why individual thinkers decided to embrace the subversive and dangerous ideas we today associate with the Radical Enlightenment.<sup>29</sup> If pursued in an interdisciplinary manner that takes into account not merely the individual thinkers' engagements with subversive texts, but also their correspondence, ties to sociable circles, as well as their social and economic background, this approach would show at an individual level how subversive, heterodox ideas became influential as a convincing frame of mind.

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<sup>29</sup> Geerlings 2012, 207-226, 222.

Admittedly, even though the concept of radicalization has been applied successfully by present day sociologists of religion to explain how individuals become susceptible to religious extremism,<sup>30</sup> the concept becomes problematic when applied to heterodox thinkers in the eighteenth century. By no means the least of these problems is the dependence on an underlying definition of what constitutes a radical thinker, which in turn is dependent on how we define what is radical or heterodox. In short, it amounts to repeating the above-mentioned tendency to impose structures on historical reality that were never perceived by contemporaries. Especially now that recent research has emphasized to what extent spinozist ideas developed in conjunction with various forms of dissenting Protestantism, the concept of radicalization seems to be too narrow an instrument if understood exclusively as an intellectual trajectory towards doctrines associated with the Radical Enlightenment. Radicalization thus described would exclude a variety of heterodox currents surrounding the late seventeenth-century Rijnsburger Collegiant movement, in which dissenting Protestant ideas such as Socinianism intersected with spinozist thought to create a fascinating intellectual ferment.<sup>31</sup>

At this point, too, the greater flexibility that is achieved by studying the early modern period from the perspective of the precarity of knowledge could prove useful. Instead of limiting itself to radicalization

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<sup>30</sup> Gielen 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Israel 2012, 181-203.

in the traditional sense, this approach would emphasize the complex of socio-economic, intellectual and personal factors leading intellectuals to embrace ideas and doctrines, which under the prevailing conditions of the time inevitably entailed varying degrees of precarity. Using this as a point of departure, the investigation can be turned toward a more general investigation of how and why certain thinkers accepted the commitment to precarity associated with ideas and agenda's not accepted by contemporary society, while others did not. This would reframe our understanding of the factors motivating individual heterodox thinkers' decisions either to use the various strategies to protect themselves, or to state publicly their adherence to these doctrines. Also, the overreliance on such explanations as the supposed persuasiveness of radical rhetoric or the sheer intellectual strength of one-substance doctrines as the most comprehensive solution to the *ancien régime*,<sup>32</sup> would be replaced by a more thoroughgoing examination of the motives behind the intellectual and ideological growth/change of individual thinkers.

Hatzfeld's journey to intellectual and social precarity was motivated to a large extent by his indignation at his failure to gain acceptance for his ideas and inventions at the Royal Society in the 1720's, as well as the patronage system within the London scientific community in general. Although it is unclear what motivated his choice to become a natural philosopher in the first place, it is evident that the difficulties he

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<sup>32</sup> Israel 2011, 7, 20-30.

experienced in London set him on a path that cemented his anti-newtonian stance. The inability to find any form of employment that fitted his perception of his intellectual abilities subsequently increased his susceptibility to subversive, oppositional ideas. Through his contacts with members of the *Aletophilenkreis*, the moderate deism of his first book turned into a full blown critique of the Bible, the idea of the afterlife, organized religion, non-meritocratic government and the arrogance of established scientists. The decision to distribute copies of this work personally to significant members of the magistrate and church communities in The Hague was another significant step. Such was Hatzfeld's confidence in the validity of his arguments, that the very real danger of persecution did not hold him back. Precarity had engendered the courage of despair. And yet, this despair never drove Hatzfeld as far as some other radicals, who embraced atheism, democratic government, and the equality of the sexes. Clearly, resentment and despair were factors that could help produce a variety of intellectual trajectories, not all of which ended in proposals to overthrow all structures of the *ancien régime*.

## 7. Conclusion

Some of suggestions for further inquiry offered above will remind readers of Robert Darnton's approach to the rise of Grub-Street. Darnton related the furious pamphleteering campaigns of late eighteenth-century Paris to a disaffected underclass of literary men who had been unable to gain access to the *philosophe* establishment. As a

result, these men bitterly radicalized Enlightenment ideas into a full blown assault on the *ancien régime*.<sup>33</sup> The elements outlined in this article differ from Darnton's approach in that they extend the subject matter from the Parisian intellectual underground to a much wider group of marginal thinkers, and also place a greater emphasis on the impact of self-labeling, the awareness of ideological dividing lines, the ways in which adherence to bodies of ideas or groups of like-minded men was expressed, and how these various aspects changed over the course of the century. The underlying assumption is that radical thinkers were not mere members of a more or less amorphous knowledge precariat, nor were they isolated individuals carrying radically unique convictions. Instead, they can be seen as individuals concerned to position themselves within an intellectual landscape that they helped shape rather than just being resigned to the margins. A further deviation from Darnton is the attention paid here to the choices made by radicals in adopting certain labels and other markers of identity in accordance with their self-perception as thinkers, while rejecting others.

In sum, the suggestions offered above are intended to build on existing work by Darnton, Mulsow, Jacob and others for a specific purpose. Studying the radical and marginal thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century through the interrelated aspects of precarity, intellectual identity and sociability will not restore the unity of the

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<sup>33</sup> Darnton 1982.

Radical Enlightenment, nor should it merely reaffirm the irreducible diversity of Enlightenment-era thought. Rather, it should tell us more about whether and how intellectual movements, alliances and friendships acquired the cohesion that many contemporaries - both insiders and outsiders - attributed to them. In addition, it will yield further insights regarding what it meant to be involved in these structures, i.e., what personal experiences and motivations were hidden behind the adherence to highly controversial, marginalized ideas, as well as insights into the use of the various markers of identity discussed above. It is perhaps inevitable that the large, amorphous mass of isolated radical, marginal and heterodox thinkers of the Enlightenment period will continue to defy attempts to be captured in concepts such as the 'Radical Enlightenment' or unifying narratives about the rise of intellectual modernity. Nevertheless, it might at least be possible to discover the ways individual thinkers defined their relationship to larger intellectual movements, how these movements acquired shared meanings for those involved, and how they subsequently became significant factors in the intellectual developments of the period.

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