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**Hochstrasser, T. J., *Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment*.
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In this meticulous amalgam of socio-historical exploration and textual exegesis, T. J. Hochstrasser casts his learned eye on the development of natural law theories in Germany from Grotius to Kant. In particular, he draws attention to a significant lacuna in Enlightenment scholarship, namely, the absence of a comprehensive narrative documenting the influence of “eclecticism” on the development of German thought in the early stages of the Enlightenment. Through an investigation of the work of eclecticism’s earliest exponent, Samuel Pufendorf, and his followers, Hochstrasser attempts to excavate this oft-overlooked methodology: a methodology that dominated the creative and intellectual landscape in Germany until the emergence of Kantianism in the middle of the eighteenth century. Indeed, Hochstrasser’s research suggests that in addition to their impact on the status of the natural sciences, the eclectics made important contributions in natural jurisprudence and were instrumental in fomenting curricular reform. “A large part of the process,” contends Hochstrasser, “by which university disciplines moved away from being mere encyclopaedic erudition and classification of empirical data, and became open to the free exercise of rational critical thought, took place within the eclecticism of the *Frühaufklärung*” (197).

Hochstrasser carries out his agenda largely through an examination of the “histories of morality,” which were, he claims, a self-image of the German Enlightenment (4). Published between approximately 1680 and 1750 in France and Germany, the primary aim of these self-evaluative short histories (which constitute the first recognizable histories of political thought) was “to provide an account of how the seventeenth-century achievement in natural law was progressively refined and revised, pre-eminently so by Pufendorf, and to relate that achievement to previous discussion of natural law by Christian and Classical writers” (1). Hochstrasser skillfully traces the development of eclecticism in the writings of Pufendorf and his most distinguished follower, Christian Thomasius; sketches its evolvment in the hands of Thomasius’s followers; and documents its eventual decline in the middle of the eighteenth century. Importantly, Hochstrasser discusses eclecticism in the context of the larger social, political, and philosophical debates of the early Enlightenment in Germany, since, as he mentions in Chapter 1:

[W]ithout a clear sense of eclecticism’s targets and from what it is contra-distinguished, its emphasis on judicious and independent-minded selection of the best of the intellectual past can seem no more than banal advice for good practice. Unless eclecticism is continually compared with and related to other debates in Protestant Germany about intellectual identity, the proper content of university curricula and the relationship of academics to Church and state its genuine character can remain elusive [*sic*]. (24)

Hochstrasser's opening chapter ("Natural Law and its History") is followed by a chapter on Pufendorf's defence of his magnum opus, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*,¹ and contains a thorough examination of Pufendorf's intellectual development. Both Hobbes and Grotius, it turns out, influenced Pufendorf: he subscribed to Grotius's explication of natural law in terms of human sociability and constructed by human reason, but became sympathetic to Hobbes's principal criticism of Grotius, i.e., that sociability is a "pragmatic individualist calculation" (55).

According to Hochstrasser, his correspondence with Johann Böcler, a professor of law and Grotius expositor, and Hermann Conring, an expert on German constitutional law, revealed to Pufendorf the need to reconcile these seemingly disparate insights and provided the main impetus for Pufendorf's methodological conversion to eclecticism. Conring noted Pufendorf's failure to square Grotius's view that sociability is an observed fact of societies with Hobbes's notion of sociability as the outcome of personal psychological calculation, while Böcler pointed out that Pufendorf failed to sufficiently appreciate the work of the philosophers of antiquity. In addition, both Conring and Böcler agreed that Pufendorf should depart from the geometric method that Pufendorf employed in his *Elementa Jurisprudentiae Universalis*² (47-60). Pufendorf adopted these methodological recommendations to form a school of thought that draws on the evidence of a range of past philosophers, most notably Cicero and the Stoics, and attempts to navigate the narrowest of straights between Grotius's principle of sociability and Hobbes's interest in the individual. Further, Pufendorf's theory seeks to avoid the trap of deriving moral obligation in natural law solely from the will of a divine superior, yet it does not entirely detach natural law from moral theology, for, as Hochstrasser is quick to point out, in Pufendorf's theory there is a "diminished but nevertheless real role for divine positive law" (3).

In the third chapter, Hochstrasser provides a comparison of Pufendorf and Leibniz. Against Leibniz's accusation that Pufendorf's work is confused and circular, Hochstrasser maintains that Pufendorf offers a coherent foundational moral epistemology. In concordance with Leibniz, however, Hochstrasser maintains that Pufendorf's theory reduces the above-mentioned real role of God to a mere "punitive arbiter" who can apply sanctions in the afterlife (106), which seems scarcely adequate to describe the attributes of a divine mind. In Chapter 4, Hochstrasser traces the development of Pufendorf's natural jurisprudence in the hands of Thomasiaus; and in the penultimate chapter Hochstrasser provides a historiography of natural law theory in the era of Christian Wolff. Finally, in the sixth chapter, Hochstrasser discusses the end of the "history of morality" in Germany. In this chapter, Hochstrasser reveals how, under the weighted influence of Kantianism, the historical contribution of eclecticism to curricular reform and to the history of philosophy began to disappear in the literature.

Hochstrasser's recording of eclecticism's impact on curricular reform is especially relevant and important, since the consequences of this impact still reverberate today. Though "eclecticism," like most other concepts, is not a univocal concept admitting of necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather a mutable concept that is not subsumable by any single principle, it nonetheless admits of a rough and ready characterization. Eclecticism, broadly construed, is a methodology that draws on the positive contributions of a wide variety of intellectual traditions, but it is not to be confused with "syncretism," the technical integrating of the elements of value in each tradition. The eclectic sees no need for the consistent intermingling or "synthesis" of ideas; the eclectic simply selects, from whatever source, anything that she thinks will be useful for her purposes. Moreover, the eclectic selects elements divorced from their artificial systems, elements that are, in her judgement, sound and practically useful; and she expects to be more successful in hitting upon useful truths through this eclectic methodology than through systematic thinking. This aversion to system building and its attendant obscurantism is the crucial element in the eclectic school of thought, especially considering its relation to curricular reform. As Hochstrasser succeeds in making clear, eclecticism was more of a polemical weapon aimed at medieval scholasticism than a sound methodology: "In the generation after Pufendorf,

eclecticism possesses an importance in the battle for control of the syllabi of the German universities in excess of its philosophical profundity. Its novelty consisted not so much in its practice, but in how it was polemically presented in contra-distinction to the orthodox principles of Lutheran scholasticism” (65).

A comment concerning Hochstrasser’s prose might be helpful to the reader. Since many of the primary sources on which he draws were written in Latin, Hochstrasser infuses a number of passages with Latin words and phrases, making these passages inaccessible to non-specialists and others who are unaccustomed to a Latin turn of phrase. In terms of content, however, Hochstrasser’s book is well nigh irreproachable: it is an important and valuable contribution to Cambridge’s Ideas in Context series. Though not the sort of book to be skimmed after dinner, feet on fender, it amply repays careful perusal. Obviously conversant with a number of different intellectual traditions and methodologies, Hochstrasser demonstrates how the development of German thought in the early Enlightenment owes considerably more to the Pufendorf-inspired eclectic school of thought than has hitherto been supposed.

Notes

1. Samuel Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1694).
2. Samuel Pufendorf, *Elementa Jurisprudentiae Universalis libri duo*, trans. W. A. Oldfather (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).