



The Limits of Optimism: Thomas Jefferson's Dualistic Enlightenment (Jeffersonian America)

Maurizio Valsania

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The Limits of Optimism works to dispel persistent notions about Jefferson's allegedly paradoxical and sphinx-like quality. Maurizio Valsania shows that Jefferson's multifaceted character and personality are to a large extent the logical outcome of an anti-metaphysical, enlightened, and humility-oriented approach to reality. That Jefferson's mind and priorities changed over time and in response to changing circumstances indicates neither incoherence, hypocrisy, nor pathology.

Valsania's reading of Jefferson, the Enlightenment, and negativity helps to make sense of the many paradoxes typically associated with that eighteenth-century thinker. At the same time, it provides a corrective to the common though erroneous equation of Enlightenment thinking with rationalism and shallow optimism.

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