What Is Left of the Enlightenment?

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Published in:
Insikt & Handling

2018

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

INSIKT OCH HANDLING

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INSIKT OCH HANDLING

Published by
Hans Larsson Society

LUND UNIVERSITY SWEDEN

Volume 26

Theme
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PUBLISHED WITH GRANT
FROM ERIK AND GURLI HULTENGRENS
FOUNDATION FOR PHILOSOPHY

PRINTED IN SWEDEN BY MEDIATRYCK,
LUND UNIVERSITY, LUND 2018
PRODUCTION: JOHAN LASERNA
COVER IMAGE: LA LIBERTÉ OU LA MORT, 1795
BY JEAN-BAPTISTE REGNAULT
ISBN 978-91-985207-0-5 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-91-985207-1-2 (PDF)
ISSN 0436-8096

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Rethinking the Mythical Standard Accounts of the Enlightenment

In October 2017 an international symposium titled "What is Left of the Enlightenment" was arranged at the Faculties of Humanity and Theology at Lund University as a joint initiative by three professors, Victoria Höög, History of Ideas and Science, Jayne Svenungsson, Systematic Theology, and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, East and Central European Studies. The immediate background was the past decades' intensified and more disparaging criticism in late modern academic trends such as poststructuralism, post-humanism, post-colonialism and post-secular theology. Hence the symposium was prompted by a growing concern about the need to bring the public discussion about Enlightenment values to a new level.

Few periods in history have been more debated and analyzed than the Enlightenment. The burden of debt is placed on the modern project, which is traced back to the Enlightenment, accused of establishing the hubris of reason and science that paved the way for the twentieth-century catastrophes. With Kenan Malik's words in the *New Humanist*: "From the role of science to the war on terror, from free speech to racism, the Holocaust, there are few contemporary debates that do not engage with the Enlightenment. Inevitably, then, what we imagine the Enlightenment to be has become an historical battleground. The historiography of the Enlightenment is as contested as the Enlightenment itself." (June 21, 2013).

Outside Academia, in Europe as well as the US during the last decades, the Enlightenment legacy has primarily been questioned by the political left, accusing liberal utopian beliefs of bearing the responsibility for the horrors of our time. For the left the Enlightenment heritage represents a devastating, over-rational, Eurocentric discourse that has created the image of the Other and hence blackboxed the sensibilities of other cultures. Even if the intentions were humanistic the left critique of racism has led to identity politics, by some people labeled "anti-racist racism."

Now in October 2018, the rapidly growing political far-right in Europe and the US has intensified the critique with xenophobic and metaphysical arguments. For the far-right, the Enlightenment represents the beginning of the cultural and political degeneration in the eighteenth century with its supposed cult of reason. The betrayal of genuine European spiritual values began with the radical philosophers of the Enlightenment. For the far-right the legacy is negative much in the same way that it is for the political left: denigrating spiritual culture, glorifying universalism and reason, and simultaneously attacking the values of liberal democracies. The liberal camp has been squeezed between the extremes, only capable of lamenting the circumstances but not formulating any positive alternative. An observation is that the liberal majority politics likewise has embodied identity politics, but under the veil of symbolic liberalism cheering everyone's equal values and rights. Mark Lilla wrote in *New York Times* on November 18, 2016 that "liberals should bear in mind that the first identity movement in American politics was the Ku Klux Klan." Another critic, Pankaj Mishra, wrote in the *London Review of Books* on September 21, 2017: "Nixon's Southern Strategy and Reagan's war on drugs successfully fueled majoritarian fears of dark-skinned minorities. In describing Hispanic and Muslim

immigrants as existential threats to the US, Trump was playing a game whose rules the founding fathers had laid down: making racial degradation the basis of solidarity among property-owning white men."

The last decades' refined scholarly critique has indeed documented the dark sides of liberalism – sometimes a racism without races, anti-Semitism without Jews. Liberalism has never been pure. The question today is not "Can liberalism be made great again?" but can it recover to deliver welfare, freedom, safety and mutual trust among its citizens? During the last years several books have been published with dark apocalyptic messages: Western liberal democracy is not yet dead but far closer to collapse than we may wish to believe. The worries about the future of democracy are reflected in book titles such as *How Democracy Ends* (David Runciman), *How Democracies Die* (Steven Levitsky & Daniel Zyblatt), and *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* (Edward Luce).

These political patterns prompt an array of questions. Can the Enlightenment legacy be rehabilitated despite the fierce critique that has been launched from various academic camps in recent decades? Is this criticism, in actual fact, only another phase in the evolving self-criticism of the Enlightenment project itself? Can the Enlightenment's powerful legacy of universalism remain a valuable source of emancipatory thinking in an age of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity? And what about the Enlightenment's complex relationship with religion? If the Enlightenment legacy is revealed to be much more intertwined with religion than has often been recognized, what are the implications? Despite being unmistakably rooted in a particular era of European history, can the Enlightenment legacy still inspire understanding and communication across cultural borders?

In the present political situation, when right wing parties are gaining popular support in Europe, and in Hungary and Poland have taken the lead, these questions are not only an academic concern, but are also imperative to the broader debate about how to best promote a good society. To phrase it in a single question, borrowed from one of our keynote speakers: How can people live together in difference? That is the most urgent political question in our time!

In view of what is happening in the world right now, the topicality of the articles from the symposium - which discuss the validity of this criticism from several perspectives, historical and philosophical – is more urgent than ever. During recent years the Enlightenment has been treated as an ideology. This issue of *Insikt & Handling* emphasizes that the Enlightenment is a tradition of ideas and norms, not a philosophical doctrine with a privileged position. Hence as both history and a normative heritage it is constantly open for change and transformations. If the debate about the Enlightenment has illustrated anything, it is that history matters and can even be a battlefield. Our keynote speakers offered an intellectual space that kept the virtues of the critique alive, but in a moderated and less excessively theoretical mode. With the publication of the symposium papers we wish to open the possibility for moving beyond the present trenches and renewing our thinking, inspired by the frameworks presented in these excellent pieces of historical scholarship.

Jonathan Israel's article "Poststructuralist and Postcolonialist criticism of the 'moderate Enlightenment' is partly justified (but not its criticism of the entire Enlightenment)" addresses the harsh criticism from postmodernism and ask why a confrontation between it and Enlightenment scholarship never occurred. Why did both sides fail to come to grips with the issues of modernity? Israel's answer is that the monolithic conception of the Enlightenment was never

questioned and the dialectic view of the Enlightenment sank into oblivion. An important forerunner, Leo Strauss, presented a more complicated view, stressing that no meaningful philosophical unity could be made from the dichotomy of an oppositional atheistic Enlightenment on the one hand, and a God-given morality and natural law on the other. This shared oversimplification consigned the thought of both pro-Enlightenment scholarship and the postmodern attack to "the realm of modern myth." A single unified Enlightenment project has never been an historical reality. Disregard for the dialectic underpinning of the Enlightenment began with Adorno and Horkheimer, and continued with Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay. The postmodernist critique genuinely identified and focused on modernity's failure to bring about inclusion and justice for all human beings – as had been originally intended with the French human rights declaration of 1789. Initially the weapon of deconstruction helped to reveal that the foundational truths of universalism had in reality not included non-white people, Jews, and women. But deconstruction failed in the long run as it attacked a myth, a non-historical image of a unified Enlightenment project, instead of acknowledging the dialectic of the two Enlightenments, the moderate and radical. Israel gives a lucid historical account of what happened. An ugly divorce took place after the Revolutions of 1848 between the radical Enlightenment – standing for democracy, republican government, and the secularization of law and education – and a deterministic socialism that believed the path to human liberation went through a transferal of the control of the conditions of economic production from the capitalists to the working class. A denigration of democracy and its values captured the imaginations of the socialists. Some of the former radicals and proponents of a democratic Enlightenment retreated to nihilism. This rift still makes its

harsh impact felt in the present Enlightenment debate. Why bother at all? Israel's answer is concise: modernity requires to be grasped as a dynamic and multifaceted process, a "dialectic of the Enlightenment," and not as it is presented to the reading public in the form of oversimplified slogans devoid of historical sensibility.

Joanna Stalnaker's article "How Does Enlightenment End?" offers a fascinating perspective, namely asking what the eighteenth-century *philosophes* themselves believed they were leaving behind after their deaths as an intellectual legacy. The end of the Enlightenment was marked by a testamentary moment; a great number of philosophers presented their opinions in the forms of texts intended for the afterlife. Daring to articulate atheistic and non-religious views in the face of death was one way of accentuating their truth claims, but another reading is also possible, as Stalnaker shows: namely, what did these thinkers think their legacy would be? Nearly all of the major figures of the Enlightenment died in the last two decades of the Old Regime: Voltaire and Rousseau in 1778, Condillac in 1780, d'Alembert in 1783, Diderot in 1784, Buffon in 1788 and d'Holbach in 1789. Sometimes Rousseau is presented as a Counter-Enlightenment thinker according to his negative view of the present human condition. Stalnaker shows that this dark view was shared by none other than Diderot. In a future world framed by dogmatic mechanistic views on reason and nature, morality and reflective self-awareness would be the victims. In several of his works, written in the 1770s, an approaching dark age is predicted in which a great deal of progress would be lost. Voltaire, at the end of his life, showed no adherence to a belief in the steady linear progress of the human spirit. Knowledge and hence progress were not forever conquered human properties, but were in danger of suffering loss and destruction. In these texts nothing of the postmodern critique of an age of hyper-rationality is

substantiated, rather the contrary. In the article another line of criticism of the Enlightenment is discussed, namely "the limitations of the Enlightenment's humanism." Rousseau, like Diderot, was increasingly concerned about the materialists' bent to reduce moral motivations to physical instincts. Rousseau is usually considered as a dualist, but in the *Second Discourse* nothing in the text points in that direction. Instead the malleability and plasticity of man endows him with "a nature distinct from other animals." In a fine phrase Stalnaker writes: "So often accused of negating difference in their quest for universalism, these *philosophes* were in fact deeply preoccupied with difference, and all the more so at the end of their lives."

Brian Klug's article "Beyond Nathan the Wise: Dealing with Difference in the Twenty-first Century" takes a different stance. He agrees with Jonathan Israel that there was no unified movement. Instead the focus is on the image or the myth of the Enlightenment, though of course not denying that the legacy has had an unsurmountable impact on our present societal and individual conditions. Klug defines myth as a story that supports ways of thinking about modernity, "a narrative raised to a higher power." In a short parenthesis he mentions that myth in this sense is analogous with the book of Genesis. His path to unlock the question "What is left?" is to discuss the "Je suis Charlie" movement after the fatal terrorist assault on the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015. This takes the form of a dialogue between a fictional person named Norman and Brian Klug himself. The latter depicts France as a divided country where the "Je suis Charlie" catchphrase might have humiliated "a group that is already demeaned, accentuating their deep sense of alienation from the nation." There is a difference between this, according to Klug, and humiliating a group that has a belonging to the society, for example Catholic priests as opposed to alienated Muslim immi-

grants or citizens from the former colonies. The solidarity manifestations the following days were a *fraternité* for some, but not for all. The argumentation is anchored in an interpretation of the post-war human rights declaration (UDHR) that makes *R* stand for respect, not a right to offend, but rights that are fundamental to our human dignity. That leads to the question: how do we formulate rights that are not offensive in a more widely inclusive ethical framework? The article ends with a discussion of what kind of tolerance is needed in our time. In contrast to Nathan the Wise, who is interpreted as saying that "he is human rather than Jewish," what is needed is a Nathan for our time who says "he is human by way of being Jewish, Christian or Muslim." In short, even if postmodern philosophy is not apostrophized, the end of Klug's article gives a clue to why theology departments have urged us to rethink the Enlightenment heritage on religion as antithetical to reason.

Richard Wolin's article "In Praise of *Philosophie*: The Actuality of Radical Enlightenment" takes its stance in the present political situation in Europe, with expanding authoritarian right-winged regimes marked by an array of horrors, from anti-Semitism, xenophobia, not to forget Trump in the US. Altogether Wolin sees the mood of the time as a "disturbing triumph of Anti-Enlightenment tradition." Adrift is the cultivation of man and institutions for the benefit of society and the individual. Wolin displays the historical roots of the Counter-Enlightenment ideology; despite some variations through the *siècles*, the main themes belong to the same value family of ethnicity and kinship against universal equality. Joseph de Maistre denied the existence of "Man" as a universal: there existed only French, Italians, Russians, etc. The similarity to the postmodern rejection of the idea of humanity is blatant. The outcome of our contemporary political predicament might be dependent on how we handle this

denial of the common interest of mankind, whether we affirm that the concept has an emancipatory normative function *or*, as some postmodernists have insisted, conceive it as a tool for oppression. Wolin exemplifies this with the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Without the Enlightenment heritage of man's equality, the declaration would probably have not existed in its twentieth-century form. What is more, if we look behind us, the declaration stands on philosophy's shoulders. Without Hegel's partisanship for reason and self-consciousness the heritage would have had a less solid foundation. In a lucid presentation of Theodor Adorno's texts, Wolin shows that his concept of "Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit" (working through the past) gives a stronger framework for interpreting *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) as an advocacy for the Enlightenment's spirit of ongoing critique. It would be nice to say that Wolin's article ends with an optimistic view of the future, but disillusionment is closer to the intellectual state of mind in contemporary times. But as long as we can imagine and have autonomy, reason, self-reflection, humanity, liberty and solidarity in our cultural vocabulary there is still hope.

Lund October 15, 2018
Victoria Höög

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Poststructuralist and Postcolonialist Criticism of the 'Moderate Enlightenment' is Partly Justified

(But not its criticism of the entire Enlightenment).

Jonathan Israel

My title reflects my own divided response to the quandary historians tend to face when confronting Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [Dialectic of the Enlightenment] well described in two introductions – that by Daniel Gordon to the volume *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment* (2001) and by Keith Michael Baker and Peter Reill to their edited volume *What's left of Enlightenment?* (2001).[1] "Postmodernity, by definition, requires a 'modernity' to be repudiated and superseded", observe Baker and Reill, and this often led, and nowhere more so than here, to what they call "a stereotyped, even caricatural, account of the Enlightenment."[2] That is broadly true but does not remove the fact that Postmodernity, while confusing 'modernity' with 'modernism', powerfully reacted against the core, or what it saw as the overall shape, of 'modernity' and, up to a point, offered substantial reasons for so reacting.

By representing the Enlightenment as a quest for domination over an objectified external nature and a repressed internal nature, a quest

employing the very term 'emancipation' to oppress, Horkheimer and Adorno built, noted Jürgen Habermas, on the efforts of Max Weber to invoke disenchanted theologies, and "ancient deities rising from their tombs," as depersonalized forces resuming the unresolved struggles of the past; this became a key element in their account of what they viewed as the systematic social, cultural and political repressiveness and failure to achieve individual emancipation and fulfilment of the present.[3] Modernity, Weber sought to show, had failed to emancipate society from the grip of older forms of repression which he perceived as deeply rooted in theology. Enlightenment came to be portrayed by the pioneers of Postmodernism as a mutilation or truncation of pure 'reason', reason's being reduced to "instrumental reason". The principle the Enlightenment lays claim to in the abstract it actually employs as means to achieve a directed rational mastery of nature, of others and of the self, through the systematic application of 'instrumental reason,' which Horkheimer and Adorno identified as the Enlightenment's true core. 'Reason' itself, through becoming an 'instrumental reason' subjected to unseen oppressive forces hidden from view, supposedly became the prime tool of humanity's self-enslavement, repression and destruction, the supreme engine of tyranny and theology combined, preparing the way for Nazism while simultaneously rendering the horrors of Nazism the quintessence of something far broader.

On all fronts, Enlightenment reason allegedly generated abject debasement and 'unreason'. One major consequence, they maintained, was that the arts became hopelessly detached from general culture, and in large part threatened with subjugation by mass entertainment, a 'popular culture' systematically "produced on a vast scale for capitalist profit and emptied of all innovative force," altogether depleted of what Habermas calls 'critical and utopian

content'.[4] For Horkheimer and Adorno, American-style capitalism in the twentieth century had to a large extent overpowered the intelligentsia, once the sphere of opposition to the status quo and the ruling powers, and hence mastered society. The consumer world of American capitalism, held the Frankfurt School, by endlessly generating new forms of mindless entertainment that effectively capture and dull the masses, expanded its reach to the point of commodifying most of music and trivializing general culture. Authentic cultural experience, judgment, discernment and criticism yielded to unthinking, uncritical consumption. As part of this, social theory and philosophy were themselves emasculated. This was what Max Horkheimer meant by claiming that in America chewing gum had attained metaphysical significance, even assumed the place of metaphysics.[5]

Horkheimer's and Adorno's view of the Enlightenment is not a philosophical critique to be rejected out of hand. The heavy stress Postmodernism places on the alleged failures and defects of the Enlightenment has, since the 1970s when their book first became widely known – the Italian translation appeared in 1966, the English in 1972 and the French in 1974[6] - turned the 'Enlightenment' into a far more immediately controversial and relevant factor in contemporary debate, and in discussion about the problems and predicaments of 'modernity,' than it had been previously.[7] However, where "Postmodernist thinkers and Enlightenment scholars", Gordon rightly observes," ought to be in close communication […] in reality they have little to do with each other." That remains true, as is Gordon's objection that many Postmodernist academics reveal a knowledge of the Enlightenment absurdly limited to just a few derogatory clichés: "the Enlightenment glorified 'instrumental reason'; the Enlightenment set out to eliminate cultural diversity" etc. On the other hand,

the claim that the Enlightenment elevated individuality to the point that men were stripped of those communal inheritances that once cemented their sense of identity, the diverse cultures bequeathed by variegated social groups which Leo Strauss likewise thought had contributed to moral nihilism and the rise of Nazism, cannot be so lightly laid aside. A philosophy wiping the slate clean of tradition must in principle deplete the rich legacies of ancient religions, particular regions and ethnic allegiances of all meaning, systematically subjecting everyone to the new universal rules of justice, equity and truth. For the religious, the mystically-inclined, and those given to a profoundly Romantic, Schopenhauerian or Nietzschean sensibility and forms of 'modernism', the Enlightenment does blind mankind to all the, for them, very real "uncertainties of knowledge", as it has been put, "by promoting an ideal of absolute scientific certainty."[8]

From the 1930s to the 1970s, meanwhile, a renowned entire set of German Jewish exiles from Nazi Germany, flatly and loudly disagreed with Horkheimer and Adorno (and Strauss) – Gordon cites Viktor Klemperer, Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay but it is useful to include here also Fritz Stern's critique of the illiberality, illiberal structures of thinking, and the anti-Enlightenment attitudes of German historians and other intellectuals from the nineteenth century down to the 1960s.[9] These towering scholarly figures supposedly "set up the Enlightenment as the positive face of modernity", and powerfully assailed German Fascism and pre-Fascist, 19th century German forms of illiberalism. But one must ask to what extent can their Enlightenment, and their German Jewish intellectual opposition to Fascism, plausibly be considered the, or an, authentic, positive face of 'modernity'? A particularly paradoxical and frustrating feature of Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) is its tendency to ignore almost completely the realms of economic life

and politics. That a work rightly often said to present a unifying, even totalizing, conception of Enlightenment thought as a reflection of the best in European civilization, and reaffirmation of Weimar liberalism in the face of the rising threat of Nazism, a work claiming the Enlightenment "set out not merely to understand the world , but to use that understanding freely to remake it, according to its lights," should say nothing whatever about the striving of 18th century enlightened despotism, enlightened reformism and the rising revolutionary consciousness to engineer those far-reaching changes, is to say the least, highly perplexing.[10] In fact, this leaves us with a giant unresolved philosophico-historical quandary.

"While Postmodernism is critical of modernity *in toto*," writes Gordon, figures such as Klemperer, Cassirer and Gay "presented eighteenth-century thought as a redeeming path into the future." However, there is a crucial point where, without realizing it, both they and their Postmodernist critics, despite the great gulf between them, importantly converged: both sets of thinkers believed they had recognized and effectively defined the Enlightenment as a vast if complex unity, a mega-project whereas both sets of writers, Cassirer and Gay no less than the postmodernists, arguably fabricated a unified historical and philosophical mirage, and a profoundly deceptive one, that never existed. Assuredly, Cassirer's and Gay's was a highly complex unity – but a unified 'project' in their eyes it certainly was. The Enlightenment "displays not merely coherence," asserts Gay, in the introduction to his *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966), the first of his two volumes on the subject, "but a distinct evolution, a continuity in styles of thinking as well as a growing radicalism. The foundations of the philosophes' ideas did not change significantly… The devotion to modern science and the hostility to Christianity that were characteristic of the late Enlightenment had been characteristic of the

early Enlightenment as well. The dialectic that defined the philosophes did not change; what changed was the balance of forces within the philosophic coalition: as writer succeeded writer and polemic succeeded polemic, criticism became deeper and wider, more far-reaching, more uncompromising."[11] Throughout his two seminal volumes, Gay always envisaged the Enlightenment as an evolving unity, an Enlightenment where, in the late eighteenth century, "as democrats and atheists took the lead in the family of philosophes, radicals rebelled against constituted authority all over the Western world."[12] But given the obsessively hierarchical character of Early Modern society and its uncompromisingly theological moral and legal fabric, a hierarchical monarchical, theology-steeped world laced with ecclesiastical sanction purportedly restored by the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, how could there possibly have been a unified Enlightenment in which "democrats and atheists" took the lead? Such a notion has never been a compelling one; it was always a pervasive but precarious historical myth.

What is fascinating here is how completely Gay, like Cassirer, ignores Leo Strauss's dialectic of *Radikale Aufklärung*, in the tradition of Epicurus, Spinoza and Diderot versus the compromises with the existing order of Voltaire, Hume, and Moses Mendelssohn, something Strauss already designated a moderate mainstream Enlightenment fighting off Radical Enlightenment in the mid and late 1920s before publishing his Spinoza's *Critique of Religion* which first appeared in German in 1930. The first scholar to clearly set out the underlying, sharp contrast between an *Aufklärung* that compromised with theology and the alternative underground Enlightenment that refused to make any such compromise, Strauss, like Cassirer and Gay, undeniably nurtured too restricted a conception of the Enlightenment; but he fully grasped, the highly misleading, nonsensical consequences

of conflating an Enlightenment that was semi-clandestine, forbidden, atheistic, and denied divine governance of the course of history and the order of nature, an underground oppositional Enlightenment, with an defensive Enlightenment championing, officially-sponsored structures of authority and thought centering on a benevolent, knowing creator God, and the principle of a God-given morality and natural law. Strauss comprehensively demonstrated that there can be no meaningful philosophical unity based on such a dichotomy, that the elision is sheer unadulterated, unhistorical myth whether on the side of Cassirer and Gay, or that of Adorno and Horkheimer.[13]

In the 1970s, Henry May, in his *Enlightenment in America* (1976), and articles on American library holdings in the late eighteenth century, became the second major figure to present the dichotomy Radical Enlightenment versus moderate Enlightenment as the primary key to any coherent grasp of what the Enlightenment actually was, that is as the Enlightenment's true core dialectic. But he too proved excessively narrow in approach, albeit leaning to the other extremity from Strauss, instead of including rejection of religious authority as a decisive criterion, focusing instead, again half correctly but too narrowly, on revolutionary republicanism, anti-monarchism, anti-aristocratism and popular sovereignty as the criteria shaping what he likewise termed 'Radical Enlightenment'. If he preferred the term 'revolutionary Enlightenment' to describe the underground, challenging force in his *Enlightenment in America* (1976), in supplementary texts published around the same time he adhered to the anglicized version of Strauss's terminology - 'Radical Enlightenment' versus 'moderate Enlightenment'.[14] Henry May's Enlightenment dialectic hence similarly crucially omitted the vital linkage, the fusing of rejection of religious authority together with democratic republicanism that constitutes the 'Radical Enlighten-

ment' concept as this term is understood by philosophers and historians today, the Western world's main oppositional counter-culture to the status quo prior to the rise of socialism in the 1830s and 1840s. This missing linkage was surely the veritable key to the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' driving the shaping of 'modernity'.

Long before the centrality of the underground counter-culture we today call 'Radical Enlightenment' came to foregrounded in the historiography of early modern times, a development only of the last two decades or so, Strauss and May each doing half the requisite work, had already identified the clandestine counter-culture at war with the official moderate mainstream Enlightenment as the key to understanding the story. 'Radical Enlightenment', commencing with Spinoza, was deemed pivotal to the 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' from the 1920s onwards, involving as it did the total destruction of all political theology and 'miracles' as Carl Schmitt grasped no less firmly than his adversarial partner in dialogue Strauss.[15] But this basic polarity without which no discussion of 'the Enlightenment' makes sense, was nevertheless disastrously ignored and inadvertently muddled by Klemperer, Cassirer, and Gay but then, equally, following them, the Postmodernists. For ignoring Strauss's dichotomy, Spinoza was also wholly divergently identified by Horkheimer and Adorno as what they wrongly interpreted as a philosophy uncovering the untrammeled nature of the Enlightenment's thirst for dominance,[16] creating a fundamental twentieth-century encounter over the meaning of Spinoza's philosophy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, astoundingly little notice was yet being taken of either Strauss's Radikale Aufklärung or May's powerfully relevant American view of the basic duality. Gordon offers several reasons why confrontation between Postmodernism and Enlightenment scholarship, instead of becoming a real philosophical and

historical problem for our contemporary intelligentsia to get their teeth into, never really directly confronted each other at all. But one wonders whether those he cites are the real reasons: Postmodernism's broad appeal, he notes, began in the 1970s, just when the appeal of pro-Enlightenment scholarship, he notes, was waning. Enlightenment scholars were generally less concerned to explore the general contours and structure of Enlightenment thought than identify the origins of the ideals and thought-patterns of the French Revolution. That is certainly true. Yet, such an approach to explaining the prolonged failure to get to grips with the issue of 'modernity' here, is surely to miss the point. Gordon rightly argued that there had been no real debate down to 2001 when he published his book and, for the most part, there is still no real Postmodernist debate focusing on the veritable, actual 'dialectic of the Enlightenment". But the essential reason for this, arguably, is not the one he gives: but rather that neither side ever escaped from the hopelessly, monolithic and oversimplified unStraussian conception of the 'Enlightenment' that Horkheimer, Adorno, Cassirer and Gay all equally adhered to, not just in terms of the Enlightenment's actual thought-content but equally as regards the relationship of ideas to society, revolution and politics.

This shared complicity in wholly unworkable oversimplification consigned both traditions of thought, critical theory and the Enlightenment project of Cassirer and Gay, to realm of colossal modern myths. For the essence of the French Revolution before the Montagnard coup of June 1793, that is the French Revolution of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen', was ideologically not a unity but an inner war within the Revolution between 'aristocratic republicanism' backed by ecclesiastics condemning 'universal and equal rights' versus 'democratic republicanism' rejecting

religious authority - and exactly the same unresolved duality and conflict within the Enlightenment characterized the democratic republican American Revolution of Tom Paine, Thomas Young, Franklin, Jefferson and Ethan Allen versus the aristocratic republicanism of John Adams, Hamilton, Jay, Gouverneur Morris and Washington. The unseen basic parallelism of the French and American revolutions which Paine and Jefferson felt so strongly but which, today is only just beginning to be adequately emphasized and recognized, is the essential reason for the 'great misconstruing', the abiding failure to accurately portray the Enlightenment's true dialectic.[17]

'The Enlightenment' within inverted commas is, as Gordon aptly expressed it, "the other of Postmodernism: not only that which preceded Postmodernism but that in opposition to which Postmodernism defines itself as a discovery and a new beginning."[18] But what was this 'new beginning'? A hopelessly false image rooted in the fact that the German Jewish championing of the Enlightenment between 1930 and the 1960s was a tragically missed opportunity. The vast conjured-up non-confrontation of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, flourished on the circumstance that both sides were equally misjudging the topic of their discussion. Yet, both sides, while pushing in opposite directions, nevertheless successfully seized one end of the philosophical-historical reality. Opposite sides of the coin, both streams were equally right and wrong, leaving to a later generation the urgent task of sorting out the abiding colossal confusion of their mythical, imagined clash by carefully 'deconstructing' the elements of their non-confrontation.

If Postmodernist response to the Weberian 'iron cage' of our present social reality, from Horkheimer and Adorno onwards, has been a rational but also deeply emotional critique, a powerful renewal of the Romantics' revolt against the accepted, the commonplace, the

dominant and conventional, in an even more alienated but now also colder, more desperate and violent key, Postmodernism's chief weapon - its relentless impulse to deconstruct, its intensified Nietzschean suspicion of 'foundational truths' proved something genuinely positive but only where demonstrably and authentically exposing false links and elisions, when confronting the bogus. It is where it genuinely identifies Enlightenment imposture and delusion that it becomes valid. In fact, there is arguably a profound correlation between the supposed ills Postmodernists denounced and repudiated and furthering 'the good' they too sought but failed to grasp via a modern-day renewal of the basic principles of the democratic, anti-theological Enlightenment. "What the modernists' efforts to escape the dominant culture implicitly indicated", it has been aptly remarked, in reference to the 'modernist' writers of Nietzsche's and Weber's generations, "and what Postmodernism makes absolutely explicit, is the belated recognition that the result of modernity's abandonment of foundational principles has been increased unanimity, an increased intolerance […] of differences within the social whole, and the general hardening of the social arteries that calls forth such images as Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence', Weber's 'iron cage', Adorno's 'administered society', and Levi-Strauss's 'monoculture'. Consent to capitalist society (and perhaps to any society), it now appears, is not a matter of belief at all – or not, at least, belief in foundational, traditional truths."[19] In other words, the social and political conditions that inspired both anti-Nazi pro-Enlightenment and anti-Nazi Postmodernism remain as dominant as ever; the intellectual challenge has not disappeared. But it is a challenge that confronts renewed Enlightenment and Postmodernism, equally, and which both must face by realigning with each other and acknowledging the underlying, long unacknowledged correlation between them.

Postmodernism helps us see our 'modern' predicament more starkly than we saw it previously, but of itself affords little support or reassurance while unreformed, while stuck in its pointless, and meaningless critique of the 'Enlightenment project': for it provides no help in confronting the dismal challenge beyond a stale multiculturalism whose only effect to is to harden warring group identities and enhance the resurgent power of theology and intolerance. Poststructuralism as a trend within postmodernism in particular tended to imply that all 'foundational truths' are essentially bogus, hyped-up, deceptive and misleading and need deconstructing to reveal the essential fraud and nothingness within – but this enticing recipe proved too simple by half. By making the Western Enlightenment, a vast movement that sought to transform thinking and ameliorate society, education and politics, its prime target, Postmodernism battered a non-existent punch-ball by failing to see the basic Enlightenment dialectic with remotely the discernment and depth of analysis required, creating a paradoxical situation. It vaunts 'deconstruction' while miserably failing to deconstruct 'the Enlightenment' into its principal constituent parts thereby freezing instead of stimulating meaningful scholarly Enlightenment and in an important sense undermining and marginalizing itself,.

Habermas, many agree, did not err in his critical assessment: Horkheimer's and Adorno's 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' fails to do justice to the "rational content of the cultural modernity that was captured in bourgeois ideals (and also instrumentalized along with them)." Not least the "universalistic foundations of law and morality" incorporated into the institutions of constitutional representative government, as Habermas terms them, are sadly missing from their critique. It is a gaping hole that wholly wrecks the thesis. In their efforts to refine Karl Marx's ideology to uncover the allegedly fraud-

ulent element behind the Enlightenment's rhetoric, the fatal mix of power with validity claims that deceive the mind, Horkheimer and Adorno penetrated behind the façade in some respects but derailed themselves by conflating their target into something very different from what it should have been. Having developed 'critical theory', the forerunner of Postmodernism, initially to pinpoint the failings or inadequacies in Marx's analysis, in the hope of explaining the delays in emancipation and disappointments the world experienced down to their time, in their disillusionment and near despair Horkheimer and Adorno ended up turning on the principle of 'reason' itself, here leaning heavily on Nietzsche as their guide to the Enlightenment's content.[20]

Adorno, adds Habermas, appeared to be entirely conscious of the paradox, the procedural contradiction involved in using 'reason', critical theory, to unmask the inadequacy supposedly lurking within 'reason' itself. But according to Habermas, "modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself. Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape." But not only does this leave open the question whether post-Enlightenment 'modernity' has come up with any foundational truths of its own that are quintessentially 'modern', it provides no answer to the question of the Enlightenment's relation to 'modernity'. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, 'modernity,' there is no denying, has become virtually synonymous with the collapse of all ideology – Marxist, Fascist, Catholic, Christian Evangelical and whatever else was inherited from the past. Does this mean 'modernity' should or can subsist without any guiding 'foundational truths'? Surely not.

Early critiques of the Enlightenment certainly saw no need, and

had little interest, in differentiating between different enlightenments. In this respect, in its Enlightenment rejectionism, its consistently hostile, comprehensive hostility to and fundamental criticism of the Enlightenment, late twentieth century postmodern, poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches, though undoubtedly a new impulse superficially, and more explicitly tied to Leftist views and sentiments than in the past, is not in essence a new phenomenon. On the contrary, ever since the widely-read *antiphilosophes* of the pre-1789 period, ecclesiastical and lay writers such as Claude-François Nonnotte (1711–93), Louis-Antoine Caraccioli (1719–1803) and François-Xavier de Feller (1735–1802), and later comprehensive foes of the Enlightenment like the early nineteenth century Dutch poet Isaac Da Costa (1798–1860) devoted their efforts, decade after decade, to fighting the irreligious Enlightenment but did so, in their case consciously and deliberately conflating it with the Enlightenment in general, so to set faith, authority and tradition in outright opposition to the irreligious Enlightenment, or what they saw as the false promise of tyrannizing philosophic 'reason' portrayed by them as really 'reason' degraded and reduced to the level of ungrounded 'unreason'.

Detaching theological Counter-Enlightenment from its originally purely religious and conservative base began in the mid-nineteenth century due to the crushing of the 'revolution of the intellectuals', the revolutions of 1848-9 in France, Germany and most of Europe. Before 1848, it is fair to say, outright rejection and comprehensive disparagement of the Enlightenment was invariably a phenomenon of the reactionary Right, of those defending crown, aristocracy and church against criticism and reform, rejecting all claims to the overriding power of 'reason' and the results of science. During the American and French Revolutions (1775–83 and 1789–99), those genuinely advocating 'universal and equal rights', freedom of

expression and press, and republican institutions (I exclude here Robespierre, Saint-Just and the Montagne who are more properly interpreted as populist authoritarians and anti-democrats) fervently affirmed and reiterated their allegiance to the Enlightenment. This was invariably the case. Whether we consider Franklin, Jefferson, Paine, Adams, Rush, and Madison, or Mirabeau, Sieyes, Roederer, Condorcet, Brissot, Destutt de Tracy or Volney all supporters of 'universal and equal human rights,' including freedom of expression and the press, were always ardent radical enlighteners- and the two phenomena are clearly tightly linked. By the 1830s and 1840s however, and this became a contributory factor in the collapse of the 1848 Revolution in France, a rift opened up among those opposed to the existing order, and ranged against the status quo, because most strands of early socialism, the ideologies of Proudhon, Fourrier, Blanqui and the Marxists being obvious instances, abandoned if they did not expressly repudiate the fundamental Enlightenment idea that the path to human progress lies in re-educating and infusing the public with better more realistic and more relevant ideas to enable it to conquer the ignorance, credulity and 'superstition' of the past barring the way to individual liberty, emancipation of oppressed groups, freedom of expression and democracy.

With those segments of the Enlightenment following Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume Adam Smith, Gibbon and Burke in rejecting 'universal rights' and justifying and endorsing primacy of aristocracy and royal courts, and consigning the great majority, the uneducated and impoverished who supposedly could not be enlightened, to languish permanently under the churches' guidance, socialists, assuredly were never in accord. But where socialists remained in uneasy alliance with the democrats and radical republicans, figures like Ledru-Rollin, Lamartine, Michelet, Arago, Arnold Ruge,

Michelet and Georges Sand, fighting for universal suffrage, republican government, free press, freedom of expression, and secularization of law and education until the summer of 1848, by 1848–9 this relationship had broken down utterly. While the incipient conflict between Radical Enlightenment and socialism, was discernible and was noted by Sismondi and others, from the outset, ideological war between socialism and Radical Enlightenment, only became overt and a factor pulverizing the democratic republican Left during and after 1848. In the aftermath, the radicals were rapidly displaced by socialism as the main opponent to the prevailing status quo. But at the same time, a large proportion of the late nineteenth-century Western intelligentsia shifted, by way of alienation, dialectically, to a new kind of intellectual, artistic and literary 'modernism' estranged from politics and the social, of which the post-1848–9 Bakunin, Wagner, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky and even the former ardent radical Michelet, now retreating in nature-mysticism, were archetypes, a context detaching the new artistic and literary 'modernity' from all commitment to social amelioration and democratization.

Where the new 'modernism' chose frustrated, enraged isolation and uncompromising individualism, the radical enlighteners had all along agreed with the Socialists that humanity lived in unnecessary misery weighed down by the chains of oppression and that, despite the misery and oppression, human emancipation and redemption were conceivable and could be achieved. The festering rift between them, dividing Radical Enlightenment from socialism, concerned what process was required to achieve this. For the Radical Enlightenment universal emancipation is achieved through changing people's ideas. The chief barrier to progress, they insisted, was ignorance and superstition. Socialists, by contrast, believed the great barrier to

human emancipation was the exploitative economic system serving the interests of capitalists, financiers, investors and industrialists; for them, the path to human liberation and freedom lay through capturing the economic system and changing it. In other words until the summer of 1848 the alliance between early socialism and the Radical Enlightenment already rested on a basic underlying contradiction but was sufficiently papered over to permit the uneasy collaboration that ended in 1848.

The crushing of the 1848-9 revolutions by the forces of monarchy, aristocracy, clergy and the financial-industrial clique, the defeat of the revolution of the intellectuals, as is well known, had a disillusioning, enduringly dispiriting effect on Europe's intelligentsia, an impact brilliantly described by J. W. Burrow in his *The Crisis of Reason. European Thought, 1848–1914* (2000).[21]Although a few, like Bakunin and Blanqui, continued striving for the Revolution as intrepidly as ever, even they, like most prominent writers and thinkers of the age, including most democrats and republicans, nevertheless felt deeply disillusioned with the proletarian masses, with the lower orders that had remained largely impervious to their democratic ideals and efforts. They refused any longer to rely on the people. Until 1848–9 Europe's intellectuals believed fervently in the progress of humanity at least in general terms; but in 1848 their confidence suffered an irreversible shock. A dejected Georges Sand reflected the wider post-1848 mood by using some very harsh expressions about the humanity in which she and those around her had invested ardent hopes, reappraising mankind as "a large number of knaves, a very large number of lunatics, and an immense number of fools."[22] Flaubert, Herzen, Wagner, Heine, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire – numerous leading figures experienced this sense of violent estrangement and helped tilt the balance so that in the age of Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and a

Proust attraction to royalism, aristocratism and anti-semitism, alienation from and aversion to the revolutionary cause, came to characterize if not the whole intelligentsia then certainly large parts of intellectual and artistic scene.

Until the 1848 revolutions, Radical Enlightenment precarious and still partly underground, remained the leading force in opposing the oppressive status quo; following the failure of the 1848 revolutions, increasingly displaced, it largely disappeared from view.. Karl Marx can be said to have made the transition within his own person slightly earlier, around the time of his transfer to Paris, defecting from his early commitment to democratic republicanism and Spinozism, and immersing himself in economic theory and socialism, from 1844. Previously, before and during his editorship of the *Rheinische Zeitung* (1842–3), Marx, already a youthful philosophical guru exerting a considerable impact on those around him and decidedly an avowed 'atheist', materialist and foe of monarchy, as well as revolutionary activist and militant democrat, was not remotely a socialist. A leading figure in radical circles, he was not yet even a beginner, at that stage, in economics or socialism towards both of which he felt no attraction and remained hostile rather than neutral until 1844.[23] Like Hess, Börne, his mentor, Bruno Bauer, and his future friend, Heine, Marx passionately rejected, deeply abhorred, every strand legal, doctrinal and institutional of the Restoration 'Christian' Germany of the princes, aristocracy and ecclesiastical authorities – along with the public Hegel. In 1842–3, an anti-religious revolutionary believing Germany ripe for Revolution, he still saw 'philosophy', radical thought, not social and economic forces, as the chief agent of revolutionary change. It is in this light that we should interpret the well-known lines that Moses Hess wrote to Auerbach about him, in September 1841 when Marx was twenty-three: "Dr Marx, as my new

idol is called […] will give medieval religion and politics the last push, as he combines a cutting wit with the deepest philosophical seriousness; imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel united in one person – I mean "united" and not blended - then you have Dr. Marx."[24] It was the portrait of an ardent foe of the status quo with, at the time, no interest in mobilizing the proletariat to capture the economic system. Only in 1844 did Marx cross over and abandon the Radical Enlightenment for socialism.

While disillusionment powerfully seized some anti-Enlightenment socialists too, Blanqui and Bakunin felt more than ever alienated from society, and Proudhon, a thoroughgoing, ferocious anti-Semite and adversary of enlightened attitudes, frequently expressed disappointment in the people during the 1850s and 1860,[25] defection from the revolutionary Left, and abandonment of the Revolution, sapped the democrats and Left republicans far more than the socialists who had invested less in in trying to change how people think. The democratic republic, and freedom of expression, was not their aim, and changing people's basic attitudes not the crucial precondition for achieving Man's emancipation. Marx's post-1844 economic and social theories with their iron laws constructed on dialectical materialism and built-in assurance of ultimate triumph via an economic logic impervious to Enlightenment questioning and doubts, nurturing an a obsessively authoritarian and dogmatic intolerance of other socialist, indeed all other views, proved especially well-adapted to an arduous long haul refused by non-socialist 'modernists'.

The social criticism of Marx and Engels in the 1840s and 1850s, however, was always dramatically prone to polemical and theoretical oversimplification by 'conflation'. A notable example is their classifying Britain as the world's leading bourgeois, capitalist society when

every searching analysis identified it as an illiberal aristocratic republic ruling a world colonial empire in league with a wholly subordinate capitalist-financial clique, a configuration decidedly different from what Marxists understood by a bourgeois society. Marx unhelpfully conflated too when labeling as 'bourgeois' and capitalist revolutionary democratic republicans those who had, in fact, for over a century, been leading the fight not just against aristocratic and court hegemony but against religious authority and all forms of institutionalized inequality. All considered, in the mid-Nineteenth Century, a traumatic and ugly divorce between socialism and Radical Enlightenment occurred that has never been healed, generating a shift that neither philosophers nor historians have ever sought to articulate with precision or ideological clarity.

A major consequence was the Marxist tendency to use inexact labels to conflate instead of analyze, a deeply-rooted habit inherited by 'critical theory', and then, for all its talk of deconstructing, by Postmodernism. No better example of such Postmodernist inaccurate conflation posing as 'deconstructing' functioning to erase vital distinctions and fundamental truths can be cited than Gilles Deleuze's *Spinoza*, *Philosophie pratique* (1970). Nothing is said here about Spinoza's democratic republicanism, or concept of the common good (the general will), or how these are integrally bound to his ethics and theory of the individual, or his destruction of all political theology. In fact, there are no social or political 'foundational truths' in Deleuze's vision of Spinoza's thought at all. For Deleuze, Spinoza's is a philosophy of life, a matter of practice: "it consists precisely in denouncing all that separates us from life, all these transcendent values that are turned against life, these values that are tied to the conditions and illusions of consciousness. Life is poisoned, Deleuze thinks, by the categories of Good and Evil, of blame and merit, of sin and

redemption."[26] Spinoza is a towering thinker, for Deleuze, because he declares war on the 'sad passions' that vitiate the individual's life, hatred and melancholy above all. What he admires in Spinoza is a practical philosophy conceived in large measure as philosophy turned against itself. Deleuze was right that writers, poets, musicians and filmmakers are more apt to be Spinozists, often without realizing it, than professional philosophers. But Deleuze's 'Spinozism' remains entirely a matter of individual lifestyle, ground on which he dubiously refuses Goethe the status of being a real 'Spinozist' while conceding it equally dubiously to Hölderlin,[27] Kleist and Nietzsche. Of 'foundational truths' useful to society there is little sign.

The problem of Marxist ideological categories conflating and erasing was in no way eased by Postmodernism, rather the contrary: confusion fomented by erasing 'foundational truths' was rendered worse by retaining several conventional usages of Marxist historiography that were, in reality, useful to defenders of the nineteenth-century aristocratic-imperialist system. An insidiously false conflation from which defenders of Britain's and Europe's post-1815, post-*Ancien regime* league between aristocracy and capitalism derived great advantage was use of the term 'liberalism'. No matter how absurd it is to bracket staunch defenders of aristocracy, empire and the public Church who outright opponents of democratic republicanism and universal rights, like Edmund Burke, or François Guizot, with proponents of democracy opposing monarchy, aristocracy and the colonial system, such as Condorcet or Bentham into one bloc termed 'liberals', this habit invaded Postmodernist thinking. Domenico Losurdo's *Controstoria del liberalismo* [Contre-histoire du Liberalisme] (2005), for example, makes excellent points regarding the deeply negative consequences of the thought of Locke and Montesquieu for any form of democratic society based on equality but with his final

analysis ruined by the thoroughly obfuscating conflation of the term 'liberalism' itself.[28]

The basic conflict between an Enlightenment conserving the aristocratic social order tied to ecclesiastical authority and buttressed by theology, the Enlightenment of Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Hume, on the one hand, and the Enlightenment of universal and equal rights, democracy and the 'General Revolution' of Paine and Condorcet, was systematically erased by Marxian ideology critique all the way from 1844 when Marx abandoned his previously fervent commitment to democracy, via Horkheimer and Adorno to the anti-Enlightenment Postmodernism of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and the rest. Meanwhile, Cassirer and Gay wholly ignored the clandestine counter-culture uncovered by Strauss, subsequently further revealed in its revolutionary potential by May, and by so doing equally helped fabricate a towering false dialectic buttressing an Enlightenment defense as inadequate in conception as Horkheimer's and Adorno's critical theory repudiating the Enlightenment as an oppressive social engine. The result was a mythology that turned the 'Enlightenment project' into an engine of non-revolutionary general change that never existed.

So inept at 'deconstructing' accurately and meaningfully – due to lack of historical sense and philosophical grasp especially – did Postmodernism prove that it stands today in need of being taught the difference between ruthlessly analyzing to get to the real meanings and components of concepts, and closing off all access to foundational truths by diffusing obfuscating opaqueness. Failure to grasp the essential points should be anathema to all 'deconstructors' worth their salt but it turned out that it is not; and here, arguably, lies the lasting, paradox rooted in confusion that constitutes the very core of 1970s and 1980s Postmodernism. Postmodernism posed as the great

revealer of hidden truths and stripper away of imposture but failed flagrantly in its claims to 'deconstruct'. For our age's overarching philosophical, historical and general intellectual misconstruing and failure to 'deconstruct' the Enlightenment, Postmodernists and German Jewish champions of Enlightenment, it seems, must equally share responsibility.

The late 20th century controversy was thus an absolute misconstruing of the veritable 'dialectic of the Enlightenment' on the part of both sides in this fiery non-argument, or mighty make-believe charade. The tragic and ironic aspect of the non-confrontation, of the Postmodernist mythology of the Enlightenment, is that the two rival visions of modernity, Postmodernism and anti-Fascist German Jewish pro-Enlightenment, became inseparably linked as totally opposed slogans and symbols. The contradiction between Postmodernism and 'Enlightenment' continued to be presented to the reading public at the level of slogans, symbols and broad conclusions supposedly representing a total collision of incompatible world views, when in fact what was presented was an entirely false dichotomy bearing no real relation to historical or philosophical actuality. The reality behind the myth was not a clash of world-views but a double failure to grasp the 'dialectic of the Enlightenment,' the Enlightenment that remains highly relevant to today.

Notes

[1] Daniel Gordon, ''Introduction. Postmodernism and the French Enlightenment' in D. Gordon (ed.) *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment* (New York-London, 2001), pp. 1–30

[2] Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hans Reill, 'Introduction', in K.M. Baker and P.H. Reill (eds.) *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Stanford, CA., 2001),p. 1

[3] Jürgen Habermas, 'The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno' in J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures* (1990, new edn., 1998), pp. 106-30, here p. 110; on the Weber connection, see also James Scmidt, 'What, if anything Does *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Have to Do with "the Enlightenment", in Sonja Lavaert and Winfried Schröder (eds.) *Aufklärungs-Kritik und Aufklärungs-Mythen. Horkheimer und Adorno in philosophischen Perspektive* (Berlin, 2018), 11–27, here p. 20 and G. Schmid Noerr, ‚Zum werk- und zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in Lavaert and Schröder (eds.) *Aufklärungs-Kritik und Aufklärungs-Mythen*, 29–52, here 31, 41

[4] Habermas, 'Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment', 111–12; Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment. History of an Idea* (Princeton, 2015), 32

[5] Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason. The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton, 2004), 302, 309

[6] Carlo Borghero, *Interpretazioni, categorie, finzioni. Narrare la storia della filosofía* (Florence, 2017), 209

[7] David A. Hollinger, 'The Enlightenment and the Genealogy of Cultural Conflict in the United States', in Baker and Reill (eds.) *What's Left of the Enlightenment?*, pp. 7–18, here p.14

[8] Hollinger, 'The Enlightenment and the Genealogy', 8

[9] Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism. Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (1955; new edn and new preface, New York, 1992), p. xv

[10] Johnson Kent Wright, "A Bright Clear Mirror': Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*', in Baker and Reill (eds.) *What's Left of the Enlightenment*, 93–4

[11] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation.* 1. *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966; new edn., New York, 1977) p.18

[12] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation. 2. The Science of Freedom* (1969, new edn. New York, 1977), 83

[13] See Jonathan Israel, "Radical Enlightenment' – A Game-Changing Concept', in Steffen Ducheyne (ed.) *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment* (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 15–47

[14] In particular May's and David Lundberg's 1976 paper 'The Enlightened Reader in America' makes extensive use of the term 'Radical Enlightenment', see Frederik Stjernfelt, "Radical Enlightenment'. Aspects of the History of a Term' in Ducheyne (ed.) *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, 83

[15] Marta García-Alonso, 'Jonathan Israel et Carl Schmitt. Révolution philosophique versus contre-révolution théologique' in M. García-Alonso, *Les Lumières radicales et le politique. Études critiques sur les travaux de Jonathan Israel* (Paris, 2017), pp. 355–85, here pp. 369–70

[16] Pierre-François Moreau, 'Adorno und Horkheimer als Spinoza-Leser' in Lavert and Schröder (eds.) *Aufklärungs-Kritik und Aufklärungs-Mythen*, 114–15, 120

[17] Jonathan Israel, *The Expanding Blaze. How the American revolution Ignited the World, 1775–1848* (Princeton, 2017), 1–24

[18] Gordon, ''Introduction', 1–2

[19] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and its Critics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 13

[20] Habermas, 'Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment',118–19

[21] J. W.Burrow in his *The Crisis of Reason. European Thought, 1848–1914* (2000), 1–19

[22] Quoted by K.W. Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague, 1964), 99

[23] Moses Hess, *Briefwechsel* (ed.) E. Silberner (The Hague, 1959), 80; Edmund Silberner, 'Moses Hess als Begründer und Redakteur der *Rheinischen Zeitung*', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 4 (1964), 5–44, here p. 24; Svante Lundgren, *Moses Hess, Religion, Judaism and the Bible* (Åbo, 1992), 28–30

[24] Hess, *Briefwechsel*, 79–80. Hess to B. Auerbach, Koln, 2 Sept. 1841; Berlin, *Karl Marx*, 67; Ludwig Marcuse, 'Heine and Marx: A History and a Legend', *The Germanic Review* XXX (1955), 110–24 here p.112

[25] Swart, *The Sense of Decadence*, 102

[26] Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy* (1970; English trans, San Francisco, 1988), 26

[27] Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy*, 128–9

[28] Domenico Losurdo, *Contre-histoire du Libéralisme* (2006, French edition, Paris 2013)

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How Does Enlightenment End?

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I would like to approach the question of the Enlightenment's legacy from a historical perspective, by asking what the eighteenth-century *philosophes* themselves believed they were leaving behind when they died. Of course, as Reinhart Koselleck has suggested, the end of the eighteenth century witnessed an acceleration of historical time, in many ways analogous to the acceleration we are witnessing today.[1] None of the *philosophes*, and least of all Jean-Jacques Rousseau, could have predicted the ways their works would be read — and misread — in the service of new political ideologies and regimes. Nonetheless, it seems to me useful — as an act of defamiliarization — to bracket the French Revolution and return to the 1770s and early 1780s, in an effort to ascertain how the *philosophes* themselves imagined their works would fare in the decades and centuries following their deaths.

I should emphasize that I am a literary scholar who favors depth of reading over breadth, and that for reasons of expertise I will be limiting myself to a few French *philosophes*, primarily Rousseau and the encyclopedist Denis Diderot, but also Voltaire and one of his most brilliant correspondents, the *salonnière* Marie-Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise du Deffand. I believe that a literary approach to Enlightenment philosophy is vital, and a necessary complement to the perspectives of historians and philosophers who work on the Enlightenment. This is because the *philosophes* I will be discussing

often expressed the conviction — and all the more so at the end of their lives — that philosophical ideas cannot be abstracted without distortion from the corporeal forms (i.e., texts) and social contexts in which they are developed. To cite just one example, in Rousseau's penultimate work, the autobiographical *Dialogues*, or *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques*, he expressed his dread that sentences from his works be plucked out of context, or worse that his works be falsified, thereby obscuring the coherence of his philosophical system.[2] Each work, and his corpus as a whole, he insisted, must be read in its entirety, with a view not only to its organic form but also to its intrinsic relationship to the person of the author. Rousseau's fears about textual corruption and misappropriation were of course inextricable from the paranoia he suffered in the last decades of his life. But they also speak to a broader Enlightenment preoccupation with the way philosophical ideas are embodied in concrete textual forms that must be interpreted as organic wholes and in relation to the body of the author. I would also emphaisze that the *philosophes* saw philosophical ideas as being forged in dialogue, and, as Dena Goodman has shown, within specific social contexts such as the institution of the salons.[3]

I will be focusing in this essay on the last decades of the Old Regime, a period we might term the Enlightenment's testamentary moment. In the 1760s and 1770s, even as the traditional testament was being emptied of its religious content and purpose, there emerged a powerful new ideal of a philosophical testament that would distill the essential thinking of the deceased without regard for social conventions or political risks.[4] Of course, this new ideal did not emerge fully formed from the *philosophes*' heads in the 1760s and 1770s. One of the most scandalous books of the early eighteenth century was the so-called *Testament of Jean Meslier*, in which an obscure parish priest, after a lifetime of humble and unremarkable

service to his parishioners, devoted three dense volumes to promoting atheism and denouncing all forms of religion.[5] Meslier's work began circulating in clandestine manuscrit form shortly after his death in 1729, but it was not until 1761 that it began to gain public prominence, when Voltaire anonymously published a heavily abridged version that preserved Meslier's anticlericalism but attenuated his atheism in favor of the vague deism preferred by Voltaire. A decade later, when the atheist materialist Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach anonymously published *Good Sense, or Natural Ideas Opposed to Supernatural Ideas*, the work was quickly attributed to Meslier and subsequently published, along with Voltaire's excerpt, under the title *The Good Sense of the Priest J. Meslier, Followed by his Testament*. By the end of the Enlightenment, Meslier's testament had become synonymous with the *philosophes*' crusade against all forms of religious oppression.

Voltaire saw Meslier's testament (in its abridged form) as an ideal vehicle for proselytizing Enlightenment ideas. As he wrote to the encyclopedist Jean le Rond d'Alembert in 1762, this was in large part because it was ostensibly a work written in the face of death: "It seems to me that the testament of Jean Mêlier is having a great effect. All those who read it are convinced. This man discusses and proves. He speaks at the moment of death, at the moment when liars tell the truth. Here is the strongest of all arguments. Jean Mêlier must convert the earth."[6] D'Alembert seems to have had these words in mind when he subsequently suggested, in his 1775 "Eulogy of Saint-Pierre," that every man of letters should compose "a last will and testament, in which he expresses himself freely on the works, opinions, men, that his conscience would reproach him for having flattered, and asks his century to forgive him for having had only a posthumous sincerity with it."[7] Diderot echoed d'Alembert's proposal in a work published just two years before his death in 1784, the *Essay on the Reigns*

of Claudius and Nero.[8] In a work that would come to be seen as his own philosophical testament, Diderot offered an arresting vision of the philosopher writing from the grave: "One only thinks, one only speaks with force from the bottom of one's tomb: that is where one must place oneself, it is from there that one must address men. He who advised the *philosophe* to leave a final will and testament had a great and useful idea."[9] The idea of placing oneself in the grave was of course by no means original to Diderot: it was a commonplace of both Stoicist philosophy and Christian spiritual exercises in preparation for death.[10] But Diderot's insistence on the act of *writing* from the grave was symptomatic of a particular cultural moment, in which the *philosophe*'s testament had come to symbolize the highest form of truth-telling.

It was during these same decades that Diderot's friend d'Holbach, host of the most radical salon of the French Enlightenment, published a series of anonymous works that in the words of Robert Favre constituted "a systematic plan to rescue the thought and feeling of death from their exploitation by the church."[11] In the foreword to his *Letters to Eugenia*, published in 1768, d'Holbach explained why the identity of the author of such an incendiary work could not be revealed. In doing so, he described the work as part of a burgeoning trend of anonymous philosophical testaments: "it is common knowledge that all the works of this kind that have been appearing for several years are the secret Testaments of several great men forced during their lifetime to *hide the light under a bushel*, whose death saved their heads from the furor of persecutors, and whose cold ashes can as a consequence no more hear from beneath the tomb the importunate cries of the superstitious than the praises of friends of truth."[12] The same motif resurfaced in d'Holbach's most important work of atheist materialism, the *System of Nature*, published in 1770. Although

he would die nearly two decades later, on the eve of the French Revolution, d'Holbach presented his *System of Nature* as a posthumous testament, the work of the academician Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud who had died in 1760: "it was then, it is said, that he composed the SYSTEM OF NATURE, a work he devoted himself to ceaselessly until his death and which among his closest friends he called his TESTAMENT."[13] With this testamentary fiction d'Holbach protected his carefully guarded anonymity, while also underlining the truth-value of an atheistic work purportedly composed in the face of death.

Thus, the end of the Enlightenment in France was marked by a testamentary moment. As Robert Favre has observed, "we have perhaps not paid sufficient attention to the great number of philosophical works of which the author felt obliged to strengthen the truth claims by presenting them as testamentary words."[14] In 1771, Louis Sébastien Mercier identified this trend and projected it into a more democratic future in his best-selling utopian novel, *The Year 2440*. In a chapter entitled "The New Testaments," he described a future in which every man (and presumably woman, although Mercier did not specify and his scorn for women authors left some room for doubt) would compose a testament of his most worthy reflections to be read at his funeral: "This book is the soul of the deceased. It is read aloud the day of his funeral, and this reading constitutes his sole eulogy."[15] In Mercier's bold vision for the future, the new testaments of the year 2440 would create "an entire people of authors," while simultaneously supplanting the sumptuous mausoleums and inscription-laden tombstones of the 1770s.[16]

The end of the Enlightenment in France was also a testamentary moment in another sense. With the exception of Montesquieu, who belonged to an earlier generation, nearly all of the major figures of the French Enlightenment died in the last two decades of the Old

Regime: Claude Adrien Helvétius in 1771, Julie de Lespinasse in 1776, Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin in 1777, Voltaire and Rousseau in 1778, Deffand and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac in 1780, Louise d'Épinay and d'Alembert in 1783, Diderot in 1784, Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon in 1788 and d'Holbach in (January) 1789. Evidently, these men and women could not have known that the French Revolution would follow so shortly on the heels of their deaths (notwithstanding Mercier's subsequent claim to have predicted the Revolution in *The Year 2440*). But to the extent that they thought of themselves as belonging to a Republic of Letters and participating in a collective philosophical enterprise, they would no doubt have been aware in last decades of the Old Regime that their generation was drawing to a close. In this context, it makes sense to take the motif of the philosophical testament — of which the *philosophes* and *salonnières* were acutely aware — as a lens through which to interpret the works they actually wrote at the end of their lives. Did they, like the fictional testators of d'Holbach's works, present their last works as the truest expression of their philosophical thinking? And how did they envision the posthumous reception of those works in the years following their deaths? In short, what did they think their legacy would be?

In evoking the Enlightenment's testamentary moment, I would also like to take up two criticisms that have been leveled against the Enlightenment over the past seventy years, since Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[17] The first concerns the deceptive and destructive metanarrative of human progress that allegedly emerged from the Enlightenment. To any careful reader of the *Second Discourse*, it should be obvious that a deeply tragic vision of human history as marked by the loss and decline of man's original nature pervades Rousseau's work. This is not to say that Rousseau

was a primitivist. On the contrary, he insisted in his autobiographical *Dialogues* that man could never return to the state of nature: "human nature does not retrograde and one can never go back to the times of innocence and equality once one has moved away from them."[18] It is true that Rousseau sought in the *Second Discourse* to instill in his readers a nostalgic desire for that period of human history that was closest to man's original state of freedom and equality. This explains why he was so often read as a primitivist, even by as astute a reader as Voltaire, who wrote to him in August 1755: "One is seized with the urge to walk on all fours when one reads your work. However, as it has been more than sixty years since I lost that habit, I feel that unfortunately it is impossible for me to take it up again."[19] But as Rousseau made clear in the *Dialogues*, any philosophical project in the service of human freedom and equality would have to be conceived within the confines of the corrupt social practices — principal among which was language itself — that had led to inequality and bondage in the first place. Nostalgic desire for the lost state of nature was simply a means Rousseau used to encourage his readers to embrace his critique of existing social structures and abuses, and a basis for imagining a radically transformed society in the future.

Some might argue that Rousseau's negative view of human history made him more of a Counter-Enlightenment figure than an exemplar of the progressive values of the Enlightenment. But I believe this view is mistaken. In fact, Rousseau's catastrophic vision of the progress of human reason and knowledge was shared by none other than Diderot, the *philosophe* who in Jonathan Israel's eyes incarnates the values of the radical Enlightenment.[20] In his foreword to the eighth volume of the *Encyclopedia*, published in 1765, Diderot ruefully described the obstacles and persecution he had faced as editor of the project. In doing so, he raised the specter of a coming revolution that

could erase the philosophical progress of recent years and usher in a new age of darkness and ignorance: "If a revolution, of which the germ is perhaps forming in some neglected corner of the world, or secretly brewing at the very center of civilized lands, in time explodes, topples cities and disperses peoples once again, and brings back ignorance and shadows, if even a single complete copy of this work is preserved, all will not be lost."[21] It cannot be denied that there is a note of tempered optimism in this passage, with the *Encyclopedia* serving as a potential bulwark against the future destruction of human knowledge. But the overall picture remains bleak: nothing guarantees that the *Encyclopedia* will in fact be preserved, and even if it does escape destruction, it will only serve to prevent the *complete* obliteration of all human knowledge. In other words, with the coming of the dark ages, a great deal of progress will inevitably be lost.

If we turn now to the testamentary decades of the Enlightenment, the sense of catastrophic loss that pervades the *Second Discourse* and the 1765 foreword to the *Encyclopedia* is only accentuated in the late works of Rousseau and Diderot. In the *Dialogues*, a work composed between 1772 and 1776 in the last decade of Rousseau's life, we find his most pessimistic assessment of the ravages of modern philosophy — the term by which he designated the radical materialism of Diderot and d'Holbach. As Antoine Lilti has noted, Rousseau's nightmarish vision of the new world engineered by modern philosophy is not dissimilar from Adorno and Horkheimer's catastrophic vision of the "triumphant calamity" of the enlightened world.[22] By speaking in the name of nature, just as the Jesuits before them had spoken in the name of God, the *philosophes* have managed according to Rousseau to exert a totalitarian control over public opinion through the easy manipulation of the masses. In doing so, they have enshrined a dogmatic view of nature that negates the plasticity Rousseau had

attributed to human nature in the *Second Discourse* — the lack of instinct and freedom of self-definition and self-determination that made man a spiritual being and distinguished him from all other animals.[23]

For his part Diderot was engaged at the end of his life in a massive project that has been called his "second encyclopedia."[24] This was the *Elements of Physiology*, a compendium of the physiological knowledge of his day but also, and much more ambitiously, Diderot's own original materialist philosophy of man. I will return presently to the question of what Diderot — closer in this respect to Rousseau than we might expect — felt was lacking in the account of man put forth by his fellow materialists, and why he felt compelled to fill this critical gap with his own physiologically grounded philosophy of man. For the moment, I would simply like to emphasize the extent to which Diderot dwelled in the *Elements of Physiology* on the physiology of death and on the resulting loss of the immense repository of knowledge and ideas that is a single human brain. In a wide-ranging chapter on memory, Diderot characterized the human brain as an infinitely plastic yet all-encompassing repository for an entire lifetime of sensations, memories and intellectual projects:

> I am led to believe that everything we have seen, known, heard, glimpsed, down to the trees of a long forest, how shall I put it, down to the arrangement of the branches, to the shape of the leaves and the variety of colors, of greens and of light; down to the aspect of grains of sand on the shore of the sea, to the irregularities of the surface of the deep, whether stirred by a gentle breeze, or foamy and whipped up by the winds of a storm, down to the multitude of human voices, of animal cries and of physical sounds, to the melody and the harmony of all the airs, of all the pieces of music, of all the concerts we

> have heard, all of this exists within us without our realizing it.[25]

Diderot's theory of what he called "immense or total memory" is remarkable in the powers it attributed to the human brain at a time when the brain sciences were generally limited in scope and relatively dismissive of the importance of this organ. The fact that the chapter on memory is placed within the third and final section of the *Elements of Physiology*, which concludes with a chapter on illness and death, foregrounds the immense loss of human knowledge that results from the death of a single individual. The human brain in Diderot's account is nothing less than a living encyclopedia, one endowed with the capacity of constantly renewing and reinscribing itself; with each death that encyclopedia is lost anew. Thus, as he had done in his 1765 foreword to the *Encyclopedia*, Diderot emphasized in his last work that the progress of human knowledge is inevitably marked by interruption, catastrophe and loss. We are far from the triumphant metanarrative of the onward march of human reason that wends its way through critiques of the Enlightenment from Adorno and Horkheimer into the present.

The second line of criticism of the Enlightenment I would like to take up concerns the alleged limitations of the Enlightenment's humanism, i.e., its inability to incorporate difference into its definitions of man. I have already touched on one reason I think this line of criticism fails to do justice to the subtlety of Enlightenment thought: this is Rousseau's insistence on the plasticity of man in the *Second Discourse*, i.e. man's ability to adopt the instincts of other animals and his lack of any intrinsic instinct that would limit his freedom of self-definition and self-determination. This, combined with Rousseau's acknowledgment that his own bare bones depiction of the state of nature was quite possibly fictional, left a blank space

at the heart of his definition of man, a space that made room for an expansive and infinitely variable conception of man.[26] And I say man, but this plasticity extended even to the question of sexual difference, a point on which Rousseau can otherwise appear reactionary and restrictive of (female) human freedom. Although Rousseau would go on in his *Emile* to enshrine the childbearing and nursing capacity of women as a basis for restricting them to the domestic sphere, in the *Second Discourse* he downplayed sexual difference in the state of nature and made the maternal instinct appear as a social construct. Women did not differ fundamentally from men in their physical strength and autonomy; their ability to nurse in an erect posture allowed them to fend for themselves in the state of nature, and they formed no lasting social bonds with their offspring beyond what was necessary to allow for the survival of their young.[27] So elastic was Rousseau's definition of man in the *Second Discourse* that he even entertained the notion that the Great Apes might actually be human. At the same time, he argued that only a new kind of philosophical anthropology that would be genuinely open to seeing man differently from the way he was already conceived in European philosophy and travel literature would allow Europeans to know anything beyond themselves.[28] It was this claim that would inspire the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to characterize Rousseau as the "founder of the sciences of man."[29]

It is well known that Rousseau contested the materialist philosophy of his day, even as he antagonized religious authorities with heretical works such as the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar." What is perhaps more surprising is that Diderot — who never deviated from his radical materialism — came at the end of his life to share Rousseau's frustration with the materialist account of man. This is not to say that Diderot ever renounced his materialist beliefs. But in his *Refutation of Helvétius*, a work begun in 1774, he criticized the

materialist Helvétius both for failing to acknowledge the specificity of man with respect to other species, and for failing to account for the differences among men. Even as he subscribed to Helvétius' materialist beliefs, Diderot argued that his physicalist explanation of man's rich mental life was frivolous and philosophically useless. In making this criticism, he paradoxically allied himself with his former friend, Rousseau, at a time when everything separated the two men both personally and philosophically:

> Here is a conclusion that is quite far-fetched. It is more suited to animals in general than to man. To move abruptly from physical sensitivity … to the love of happiness, from the love of happiness to self-interest, from self-interest to attention, from attention to the comparison of ideas. I cannot put up with such generalities. I am a man, and I need causes that are proper to man. … What utility will I draw from this string of consequences that are equally suited to the dog, the weasel, the oyster, the dromedary. If Jean-Jacques denies this syllogism, he is wrong. If he finds it frivolous, he could well be right.[30]

Diderot's exclamation — "I am a man" — is revealing. It suggests that there was something about his personal experience of being a man that led him to find Helvétius' materialist account of man's inner life unsatisfying. As Jean Fabre has observed, Diderot found Helvétius' posthumous work, *On Man*, deeply disappointing because he felt that "no man worthy of that name could recognize his humanity in it."[31] Was Helvétius so lacking in humanity that he did not perceive the limitations of his own account? Overall, Diderot's *Refutation* paints a portrait of Helvétius as a man curiously lacking in self-awareness and even interiority. In fact, this portrait is not so far from Rousseau's devastating depiction of the materialists in his last work, the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. If Rousseau sees himself as alone in his last

work, it is because he finds himself surrounded by machine-like beings who operate according to mechanistic laws of nature and whose inner life is inaccessible to him or simply nonexistent:

> After having searched in vain for a man for ten years, I finally had to extinguish my lantern and cry out to myself, there aren't any left. Then I began to see myself as alone on the earth, and I understood that my contemporaries were nothing to me but mechanical beings who acted on impulse alone and whose actions I could calculate only by the laws of movement. Whatever intentions, whatever passions I could have supposed within their souls, that never would have explained their treatment of me in a way I could understand. It was thus that their inner dispositions ceased to matter to me. I no longer saw anything in them but masses transformed in various ways, utterly lacking in morality with respect to me.[32]

For Rousseau, the materialist account of man posed a moral problem: deterministic, mechanistic explanations of human behavior deprived man of the spirituality and inner freedom Rousseau had attributed to man in the *Second Discourse*. It is important to note that although Rousseau is generally considered a dualist, nothing in the *Second Discourse* indicates that the spiritual dimension of man, and hence his capacity for morality, are dependent on the existence of a human soul. Rather, it is simply the lack of a fixed nature — the plasticity and perfectibility of man — that endows him with freedom and a spiritual nature distinct from other animals.

Rousseau was not alone in his qualms about the moral vacuum of materialist philosophy. Despite his own materialist beliefs, Diderot became increasingly preoccupied at the end of his life with the difficulty of accounting for moral meaning within the materialist framework. In one of the most damning passages in the *Refutation*,

he went so far as to accuse Helvétius of reducing all human motivations to physical impulses, from the desire to ejaculate in the morning to the need to defecate in the evening:

> Well, Mr. Helvétius, all the projects of a great king, all the efforts of a great minister or of a great magistrate, all the meditations of a politician, of a man of genius, are thus to be reduced to ejaculating a good shot in the morning and making a turd in the evening. And you call that moralizing and knowing man.[33]

If Diderot chose to ally himself with Rousseau in accusing Helvétius of frivolity, it was above all because the materialist credo laid out in *On Man* seemed to strip human life of all moral significance. In the end, Helvétius was not so different from Rameau's cynical nephew, who found no greater meaning in human life than the copious production of shit: "The important point is to go easily, freely, copiously, every evening in the toilet; *o stercus pretiosum* [o precious manure]! that is the grand outcome of life in every station."[34] Read together, the *Refutation of Helvétius* and *Rameau's Nephew* make it clear that Diderot had serious doubts about the potentially cynical moral repercussions of materialist philosophy. At the end of his life, he sought in his own materialist philosophy of man to reconcile Helvétius and Rousseau, to develop a philosophy of man that acknowledged man's material nature, while also accounting for his rich inner life and his sense of moral purpose.

The surprising convergence I have sketched out between Rousseau and Diderot at the end of their lives suggests that the *philosophes* — at least some of them — were by no means blind to the potential limitations of the Enlightenment's humanism. In fact, if we broaden our lens, we find that there was even before the testamentary decades a

current of Enlightenment thought that acknowledged those limitations and saw situated self-knowledge as a necessary precondition to any broader knowledge of man. In the opening pages of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau quoted the best-selling naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, to support his claim that knowledge of man was the most useful and least advanced of all human knowledge in his time. Curiously, in the *Natural History*, a work devoted to the empirical description of quadrupeds, birds, human racial varieties, the earth and its minerals, Buffon insisted that our efforts to gain encyclopedic knowledge of the outside world should not distract us from the more pressing task of using our inner sense to gain knowledge of what lies within:

> However much interest we have in knowing ourselves, I wonder if we do not know more about everything apart from ourselves. Endowed by nature with organs designed solely for our survival, we use them only to receive impressions from outside ourselves, we seek only to reach beyond ourselves, and to exist outside ourselves; too occupied with multiplying the uses of our senses and increasing the expanse of our being, rarely do we make use of that inner sense that reduces us to our true dimensions and separates us from everything that is not proper to us.[35]

The challenge for Enlightenment philosophy, then, was how the empirical study of men (and women) in all their diversity could be combined with the essential philosophical task of turning within to engage in situated self-study. It was this challenge that Rousseau took up in his *Second Discourse* and in his autobiographical corpus, and it was this challenge that led Diderot to refute Helvétius and pursue his own materialist philosophy of man. So often accused of negating difference in their quest for universalism, these *philosophes* were in

fact deeply preoccupied with difference, and all the more so at the end of their lives.

I would like to return now to the question of how the *philosophes* imagined their legacy in the closing decades of the Old Regime, what they thought would be left of the Enlightenment after their deaths. I hope to have established that Rousseau and Diderot shared a preoccupation at the end of their lives with the limitations of the Enlightenment philosophy of man. Rousseau's claim in the *Reveries* to have abandoned his quest for man — an implicit reference to the Ancient Cynic philosopher Diogenes — points to a curious disjuncture between his last work and the rest of his philosophical system, as he called it. Whereas Rousseau had long sought to establish the natural goodness of man — in the *Second Discourse*, but also in his educational treatise *Emile* and his autobiographical *Confessions* — in his last work he abandoned that project in favor of a form of meditative self-study that was explicitly divorced from any broader claim about the nature of man. Whereas previously he had boldly signed his works as the Citizen of Geneva, he now claimed to write for himself alone, in isolation from other men and from human society.[36] This gesture might easily be interpreted as an abdication of civic responsibility, a retreat from the political convictions in favor of human freedom and equality that had marked his earlier works, from the *Second Discourse* to the *Social Contract*. But again I believe this view is mistaken. Whatever Rousseau's intentions for the work, the *Reveries* stands as an assertion of man's internal difference from the beings surrounding him, and of the necessity that any definition of man, and any political system designed to preserve human freedom and equality, must attend to that difference. Above all, the *Reveries* bears witness to the fragility of man's original connection to nature, and the constant risk that it be destroyed by civil society.

Diderot did not adopt Rousseau's defiant posture of solitude in his last works. On the contrary, he pursued in the *Elements of Physiology* his elusive quest for a materialist philosophy of man that would connect man's outer material being to his rich inner life. At the same time, he suggested in his last published work, the *Essay on the Reigns of Claudius and Nero*, that both his name and his works would soon be lost to the passage of time. Whereas a little over a decade earlier, in his correspondence with the sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet, he had insisted on the writer's quest to make an immortal name for himself, he now noted ruefully that it mattered little whose name was on the pedestal of a statue or the title page of a book: "one doesn't realize that after a certain number of relatively short years, and that go by quickly, it will matter very little whether there is on the title page of the *Pétréïde*, Thomas, or another name."[37] Like Rousseau, who claimed not to care whether the pages of the *Reveries* were lost or destroyed, Diderot contemplated the inevitable effacement of his name in history with seeming equanimity. He depicted his philosophical life in the *Essay* as one given up in the service of others, rather than as a quest for a legacy that would survive beyond his grave.

I have suggested that a sense of catastrophic loss pervades the works of both Rousseau and Diderot, and that this sense was only accentuated in the Enlightenment's testamentary decades, in a way that negates any facile understanding of the Enlightenment's blind faith in human progress. I would like to conclude by touching briefly on two other writers, Voltaire and the salon hostess Deffand, who grappled perhaps more directly and eloquently than any others with the ramifications of death in the materialist framework. I do not mean to characterize these writers as materialists: Voltaire was a proponent of moderate Enlightenment who adhered to his deist beliefs until the end of his life; Deffand was in no sense a systematic philosopher,

although her brilliant correspondence with Voltaire and the English man of letters Horace Walpole demonstrates her deep engagement with the philosophical questions of her day. But whether or not they held materialist beliefs, Voltaire and Deffand both faced head-on the nothingness — *le néant* — that the loss of human life entails in the materialist framework. It was this nothingness that the atheist Jean Melier evoked in the closing lines of his philosophical testament: "The dead with whom I am on the point of going bother themselves with *nothing* and worry about *nothing*. I will thus finish this with *nothing*, consequently I am hardly more than *nothing*, and soon I will be *nothing*, etc."[38] It was this devastating conclusion that the moderate deist Voltaire felt compelled to revise, replacing in his abridged version of Melier's testament this final drumbeat of nothings with a a prayer to God that he bring his faithful back into the fold of a natural religion rather than Christianity. Yet in his correspondence with Deffand, Voltaire found himself once again confronted with the specter of nothingness, as his correspondent described the existential ennui she suffered from as "a foretaste of nothingness" and frequently evoked her preference for nothingness over the suffering of human life. To cite just one example, in May 1764, Deffand responded to Voltaire's request that she sketch out her own philosophy of human nature for him with the following:

> Your last letter (which you can certainly not remember) is charming. You say that you would like me to tell you my thoughts. Ah! Monsieur, what are you asking me? They are limited to one only: a very sad one; that there is, rightly speaking, only one misfortune in life which is to be born. There is no condition whatsoever which seems to be preferable to nothingness and you, yourself, who are Monsieur Voltaire, whose name encompasses every kind of happiness, reputation,

> honor, fame, everything to preserve you from ennui, you who find in yourself every kind of resource, and a wide philosophy which made you foresee that wealth was necessary in age; well, Monsieur, despite all these advantages it would have been better not to have been born for the very reason that you must die, of that we are certain and nature revolts so strongly against it that all men are like the woodcutter.[39]

Voltaire responded to this characteristicly somber disquisition with dark irony: "It is not that nothingness has nothing good in it, but I think it is impossible to truly love nothingness, despite its good qualities."[40] If this response seems flippant, a poem composed about a decade later testifies to Voltaire's deep and continuing engagement with Deffand's conception of death as an embrace of nothingness.[41] In "The Empty Dream," the poet recounts a dream in which he traverses the three rivers of the Greek underworld, meets the three Fates and rejects both Tartarus and the Elysian fields as unsatisfying. The poem concludes when he finds himself confronted by the figure of Nothingness and throws himself into a final embrace:

> What do you want from me? I said to this character.
> — Nothing, he said to me, for I am Nothingness.
> This whole country belongs to me.
> With this speech I was a bit troubled:
> You, Nothingness! He has never spoken…
> — Indeed I speak; I am invoked, and I inspire
> All the scholars who on my vast empire
> Have published such an enormous jumble…
> — Well then! my king, I throw myself into your arms.
> Since into your breast the whole universe dives,
> Here, take my verses, my person and my dream:
> I envy the fortunate mortal
> Who belongs to you from the moment he is born.

The vision of death Voltaire presents here could hardly be further from any consoling faith in posterity or the progress of the human spirit. With his ironic reference to the enormous jumble of writings inspired by Nothingness, the poet seems to consign his own oeuvre to the rubble heap. In embracing Nothingness, he gives up not just his person, but also his verses and the dream on which they are based, thereby erasing the poem he has just written. He concludes the poem with what one critic has called Voltaire's "most pessimistic comment on the human condition": the wish that he could have belonged to Nothingness from the moment of his birth.[42] Were this wish to be granted, it would erase not just the verses we have just read but the poet's entire existence as a writer.

What does it matter if Enlightenment writers as diverse as Voltaire, Deffand, Rousseau and Diderot approached the end of their lives with little faith that their works would be preserved in the form of an enduring legacy? This did not prevent the revolutionaries from brandishing the *Social Contract* or pantheonizing Voltaire and Rousseau as illustrious heroes of the nation. Nonetheless, the *philosophes*' acute awareness of the fact that human knowledge and enlightenment suffer loss and destruction should alert us to the fact that our task must always be to guard against the distortion and falsification of Enlightenment works that Rousseau feared so greatly. And as we attend closely to the works of the Enlightenment, our task is also to meet their challenges. How is it possible to acknowledge human difference while also preserving human freedom and equality? Rousseau may seem to have failed that task when it came to women, given the restrictive views on women's education and social and political existence outlined in *Emile*.[43] But we cannot read *Emile* without keeping the *Second Discourse* in mind, and grappling with the challenge Rousseau posed to our desire to define human nature in

accordance with the restrictions of society as we know it. How is it possible to adhere to progressive values when one knows that human progress will inevitably suffer catastrophic losses? How is it possible to maintain an urgent awareness of the always fragile link between man and his original nature, while also embracing the project of social and political reform? These are the challenges that were posed with special acuteness in the Enlightenment's testamentary decades, and that critics and proponents of the Enlightenment alike must be prepared to take on.

Notes

1 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 3–20.

2 This is made especially clear at the beginning of the third dialogue, when the Frenchman presents a list of quotations, classed under various categories, taken out of context, and then proceeds to describe his discovery, through a more intensive, comprehensive reading, of Jean-Jacques' philosophical system. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau juge de Jean Jaques*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 916–37.

3 On this point, see my review essay, "Jonathan Israel in Dialogue," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77.4 (October 2016): 637–48; on the salons, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and, for a contrasting view, Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

4 On the decline of religious language in testaments in France over the course of the eighteenth century and especially in the last decades of the Old Regime, see Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle: Les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Plon, 1973); and Pierre Chaunu, *La mort à Paris: XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).

5 Jean Meslier, *Le Testament de Jean Meslier*, ed. Rudolf Charles, 3 vols.

(Amsterdam: R. C. Meijer, 1864).

[6] Voltaire to d'Alembert, aux Délices, 12 July [1762], Letter D10581 in *Voltaire's Correspondence*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 107 vols. (Geneva: Musée et Institut Voltaire, 1953–1965), 25:98. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are my own.

[7] Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Oeuvres de d'Alembert*, vol. 3 (Paris: A. Belin, 1821), 260.

[8] The first edition of this work was published under the title *Essai sur Sénèque* in 1778, the year of Voltaire's and Rousseau's deaths.

[9] Denis Diderot, *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 25, ed. H. Dieckmann and J. Varloot (Paris: Hermann, 1986), 249. Jean Ehrard characterizes the *Essai* as "un véritable testament intellectual et moral," while Pierre Chartier calls it a "déroutant testament personnel." See Jean Ehrard, "Pourquoi Sénèque?" in Diderot, *Essai*, 6; and Pierre Chartier, "Présentation," *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie* 36 (2004): http://rde.revues.org/index638.html [accessed June 26, 2017].

[10] See Robert Favre, *La mort dans la littérature et la pensée françaises au siècle des Lumières* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1978).

[11] Favre, *La mort*, 162. D'Holbach's salon is more often referred to as a coterie, following the pejorative phrase "coterie holbachique" coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but as Dena Goodman has suggested, the effort to set d'Holbach's group apart from female-led salons has more to do with historians' preconceptions about gender and philosophy than with a genuine historical distinction. See Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 58–61; and Alan Charles Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967).

[12] Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach, *Lettres à Eugénie, ou Préservatif contre les préjugés*, 2 vols. (London, 1768), xi–xii.

[13] Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach, *Système de la nature, ou Des loix du monde Physique & du monde moral. Par M. Mirabaud* (London [Amsterdam], 1774), n.p.

[14] Favre, *La mort*, 528.

[15] Louis Sébastien Mercier, "Les Nouveaux Testamens," *L'An deux mille quatre cent quarante, rêve s'il en fût jamais* (London: 1771), 55.

[16] On the ways the regime of the dead was changing in the eighteenth century, see Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), especially

Chapter 4, "The Churchyard and the Old Regime."

[17] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[18] Rousseau, *Rousseau juge de Jean Jaques*, 935.

[19] Voltaire to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, aux Délices, 30 August 1755, Letter 5792 in *Voltaire's Correspondence*, 27:230–32.

[20] Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56–92; 413–42.

[21] Denis Diderot, "Avertissement," Tome 8, in "Front Matter," *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Autumn 2017 Edition), Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (eds), http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/. Accessed August 15, 2018.

[22] Antoine Lilti, "The Writing of Paranoia: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Paradoxes of Celebrity," *Representations* 103.1 (Summer 2008): 74; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 1.

[23] Rousseau, *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, 966–69; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 141–42.

[24] Kurt P. A. Ballstadt, *Diderot: Natural Philosopher*, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008), 209.

[25] Denis Diderot, *Éléments de physiologie*, ed. Paolo Quintili (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 295.

[26] Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, 123.

[27] Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, 137.

[28] Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, 208–214.

[29] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau fondateur des sciences de l'homme," *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1962): 239–48.

[30] Denis Diderot, *Réfutation d'Helvétius*, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XXIV, eds. H. Dieckmann et al. (Paris: Hermann, 1975–), 523.

[31] Jean Fabre, "Frères ennemis: Diderot et Jean-Jacques," *Diderot Studies* 3 (1961), 204.

[32] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 1078.

[33] Diderot, *Refutation*, 529.
[34] Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XII, 96.
[35] Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, 195–96.
[36] See Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[37] Diderot, *Essai*, 363.
[38] Meslier, *Testament*, 3:598. It is notable that this passage is quoted by the historian Michel Vovelle, but with the final etc. truncated. See his *La Mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours*, *Précédé de "La Mort, état des lieux"* (1983; Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 409.
[39] Deffand to Voltaire, 2 May 1764, in *Correspondance complète de la Marquise du Deffand*, ed. Lescure, 2 vols. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1865), 1:289.
[40] Voltaire to Deffand, aux Délices, 9 May 1764, Letter 11028 in *Voltaire's Correspondence*, ed. Theodore Besterman, vol. 55 (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1960), 21.
[41] On the dating of "Le songe-creux," most likely composed in 1773, see Charles G. Vahlkamp, "Dates for Two Previously Undated Voltaire Poems," *Romance Notes* 18.1 (Fall 1977): 95.
[42] Vahlkamp, "Dates for Two Voltaire Poems," 95.
[43] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 692–868.

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Beyond Nathan the Wise: Dealing with Difference in the Twenty-first Century[1]

Brian Klug

Preamble: A world of difference (or, How do we say 'we'?)

We inhabit a world of difference, a world in which people with diverse and developing identities bump up against each other every day. Once upon a time it was easier to say, as Kipling put it, that east is east and west is west. But now the twain rub shoulders in the crowded streets of countless cities. Cultures can no longer be placed (if ever they could) by the four points of the compass. Nor by the distinction between metropole and colony. Moreover, various other identities, such as male and female, refuse to stay put in the fixed places to which they have been assigned. All these volatile identities demand recognition: they will not hide in the closet. This is the state of affairs that gives rise to the question posed by the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall: How can people live together in difference?[2] How do we share the same space? How do we *deal* with difference? How do we say 'we'? This is the context in which I place the question posed by this symposium: 'What is left of the Enlightenment?' Or, for short, 'What is left?'

I. The Enlightenment myth (or, Norman's speech)

The question 'What is left?' is a question about the Enlightenment legacy. In a sense, it is two questions in one – or one question on two levels. On one level, it is a question about the Enlightenment as a historical reality. On the other level, it is about 'the Enlightenment' in quotation marks: the impression it has made on the popular mind: its public image. This impression is, in a way, part of its legacy. I shall approach the first question (or level) via the second, the historical reality via the popular image.

To clarify what I mean, let me comment on the article 'What Enlightenment Project?' by James Schmidt. Schmidt opens by criticising critics of the Enlightenment. The examples he gives include Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, John Gray, Berel Lang and others. He thinks that, whatever their differences, typically they assume that there is "something called 'the Enlightenment project': a set of intentions, originating in the eighteenth century, that still work mischief two centuries later."[3] He rejects this assumption. His central thesis is this: "The Enlightenment project is largely a projection of the Enlightenment's critics, a projection that fastens onto a few thinkers or tendencies within a broader period and, having offered an account of what it sees as the failings of these thinkers or these tendencies, prides itself on having demonstrated the failure of the entire age."[4] In other words, critics attack a straw man. First, they create an imaginary object called 'the Enlightenment project' and then they knock it down.

Schmidt's analysis is astute – a little too astute for comfort in my case, as on occasion I have been guilty as charged. But his analysis cuts both ways. There are defenders who refer to 'the Enlightenment

project' too, and the selfsame charge with which Schmidt indicts critics can, *mutatis mutandis*, be levelled at *them*. Tweaking his central thesis (the sentence I just quoted), we can, with equal validity, say as follows: The Enlightenment project is largely a projection of the Enlightenment's *defenders*, a projection that fastens onto a few thinkers or tendencies within a broader period and, having offered an account of what it sees as the *successes* of these thinkers or these tendencies, prides itself on having demonstrated the *success* of the entire age.' There are, in short, guilty parties on both sides of the argument. (Which, of course, is not to say that all parties on either side of the argument are guilty.) To Schmidt's credit, he acknowledges that his analysis cuts both ways, but this is not until a fairly brief section at the end of his article: "For its defenders," he says, "as for its critics, the Enlightenment project is a projection".[5] So, these are two sides of the same coin, where the coin is the noun phrase 'the Enlightenment project'. But, given how he opens his article and where he places the emphasis, clearly Schmidt is gunning for critics.

I shall adopt Schmidt's analysis but flip the coin onto the other side. I accept his premise that there was no unified set of aims and intentions that the movement *as a whole* pursued – no single 'Enlightenment project' – although I think it is fair to say that certain ideas and tendencies were more pronounced than others, and that this goes some way towards explaining the image of the Enlightenment in the popular mind. It is the *image* – the myth – on which I shall focus. In contrast to Schmidt, I shall criticise defenders, although (again unlike Schmidt) defenders in the public square rather than in academia. The myth looms especially large in the vexed debate about freedom of expression and 'the right to offend', which is at the heart of the public discussion of difference. This controversy has been simmering ever since the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman

Rushdie in February 1989 for his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Every so often, the controversy boils over, as it did following the murderous assault on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in January 2015. If, in order to critique the Enlightenment myth, I dip into the 'Je suis Charlie' debate, it is not for its own sake but more as a key with which to unlock the question 'What is left?' This discussion will occupy the second half of the present section and the whole of the next section. I shall not get to Nathan the Wise until the fourth and final section, where he will help me bring my argument to a (sort of) close.

By 'the Enlightenment myth' I do not intend to suggest that the Enlightenment *as such* is a myth – not in any sense of the word 'myth'. I am not, to put it another way, engaging in 'Enlightenment denial'. It would be absurd to do so, for the legacy of the Enlightenment is woven into the fabric of our thinking. Moreover, a significant portion of that legacy has been a priceless boon to our collective wellbeing. But not when it gets in the way of thinking for ourselves about our predicaments. Towards the end of his article, Schmidt makes an observation that is as sound as it is simple. He suggests we "recognize that the dilemmas that face us today may be different than those which concerned thinkers in the eighteenth century."[6] As a piece of common sense, his observation might have been welcomed by the *philosophes* themselves. It is certainly welcomed by me, for it goes to the heart of the argument I shall make in this paper. This is not the eighteenth century. What we need are twenty-first century tools for a twenty-first century toolbox. This, I shall argue, calls for thinking in the form of *re*thinking: radically reworking some of the tools that we inherit from the Enlightenment.

I should also clarify how I am using the word 'myth'. The word has come to connote – perhaps because of an influence that itself emanates from the Enlightenment – fiction as opposed to fact (as in:

'the myth that everyone in England takes tea at four o'clock'). But, in the sense in which I am using the word, a myth might or might not be fictitious, either in part or in whole. By 'myth' I mean an account of things that is foundational for a given way of thinking. Myth, in the sense I mean, is narrative raised to a higher power. (In this sense – in *this* sense and not in a dismissive sense – I see the book of Genesis as myth.) It is the role or function played by a narrative, not the truth value of its component parts, that makes it a myth. I should add that since some strands of the Enlightenment myth reflect actual strands in Enlightenment thought, I shall, at times, make claims about the latter. But primarily I shall be speaking about the Enlightenment as a *rhetorical*, rather than *historical*, phenomenon.

When I refer to 'the Enlightenment myth', I mean a story about the Enlightenment that supports a whole way of thinking about modernity, including difference in a plural society and how to deal with it. Like many myths, this story is compounded of both the false and the true; and even the true is liable to be a caricature of actual Enlightenment thinking. But somehow it hangs together; it hangs together in the telling rather than in the world. Now, like anything else, myths can be good or bad, illuminating or obfuscating. I shall argue that the Enlightenment myth does the opposite of illuminate: it hampers our ability to think for ourselves about (in Schmidt's words) "dilemmas that face us today". As such, the myth is antithetical to the best elements of the Enlightenment legacy: autonomous thought, along with self-critique and a universal sensibility – although all these elements themselves are up for grabs as we rethink the thinking of the Enlightenment.

Finally, what I am calling 'The Enlightenment myth' is not something you can look up in a canonical text. Nor does it have a hard and fast content. It is not something that can be placed at the door

of one thinker or commentator or pundit. No copyright governs its use. It is in the public domain. It is in the air. It is everywhere. The version I am about to present is embedded inside a speech. The speech is imaginary. But much of it is cobbled together, or adapted from, remarks that I have read or heard in the media or in conversation or in formal debates in which I have spoken. What the speech reflects could be called a mentality. It is this mentality, ultimately, with which I am grappling.

A speech has to be put into a mouth and I need a name for the person to whom this mouth belongs. I shall call him Norman.

Norman's speech

> Let me start off by saying, Dr Klug, that I have been waiting here patiently in the wings, listening to you drone on, like a typical Oxford don, and, frankly, if I did not respect your right to free speech I would have interrupted you ages ago. It is all very well to make pedantic points about the meaning of the word 'myth', but ultimately the question is not merely academic. We are living at a time when superstition and prejudice are making a comeback. The resurgence of faith in the twenty-first century among certain sections of the population poses a threat to the modern world. And when I say 'certain sections of the population', you can wipe that sneer off your face: this is not about Islam and I am no racist. It is about religion, all religion and any religion. Whether it's Mohammed or Moses or Jesus Christ makes no difference. The essence of religion is that you stop thinking and blindly believe. Enlightenment values are in peril. Reason itself is under attack. And so is freedom. If we give in to the demands of believers, soon we will not be allowed to speak our minds, nor read the books or watch the plays and movies we choose. Look at the fuss over the Danish cartoons and *Charlie Hebdo* – and all because

> believers of a certain faith were offended! But freedom of expression – the right to free speech – means nothing without the right to offend. No one has the right *not* to be offended. Take me, for example: I was offended by your whole approach to this subject but I did not interrupt you. As the father of the Enlightenment, Voltaire, famously said, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." This is why I wore my 'Je suis Charlie' badge with pride. It is not that I approve of what they published. But I do salute their courage. They dared to offend. We all have to put up with being insulted or offended from time to time. Somehow (and I know it is not easy) we have got to get this point across to them – the newcomers in our midst who bring their religious and cultural baggage with them. We have got to get them to understand that they live in a secular society where everyone is equal: where they are free to believe what they want, as long as they do not infringe on the rights of others. If we are not careful, all our precious hard-won freedoms will go out the window. And think what all this would mean for what goes on in the classroom: we will soon be back to teaching our children myths – falsehoods – about creation instead of scientific facts. In short, it seems we need to fight the battle for the Enlightenment all over again. Otherwise we are going to end up back in the Middle Ages – which, may I remind you Dr Klug, was when Oxford University was founded. That should tell you something about Oxford.[7]

The first thing I should say is that I am grateful to Norman for not interrupting me. Second, I expected him to speak frankly, but I am not sure that the *ad hominem* references to Oxford at the beginning and end of his speech strengthen his case. On the other hand, they make a point, and the point they make is fundamental for this symposium, given the political concerns that have prompted it.[8] Norman

reminds us that academics like ourselves do not own the debate over what's left of the Enlightenment. It is the hot property of the general public too. As I said earlier, the question 'What is left?' is two questions in one – or one question on two levels. It is about the Enlightenment as a reality and it is about the Enlightenment as a myth; for, to repeat, the latter is part of the legacy of the former. My point of entry into the first question is via the second. And now it is time to take the plunge and reply to Norman.

II. Critiquing the myth (or, Dear Norman)

Dear Norman,

Tack så mycket. But I think I have got more than I bargained for when I gave you the floor. There is no way I can address all the points you have made. I shall have to be selective.

The question is, where to start? Perhaps with your father-fixation. When you call Voltaire 'the father of the Enlightenment' (and I know that you did not coin the phrase) you imply that he either founded the Enlightenment singlehandedly or is its representative figure *par excellence*. This is wrong, doubly so. You quote Voltaire as famously saying, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." It is perhaps this statement more than any other that makes Voltaire 'the father of the Enlightenment' in your eyes and in the eyes of millions of people. As it happens, Voltaire never said what he famously said.[9] The idea that he did is a myth in *your* sense of the word: a falsehood. But let that pass; it is the sort of thing Voltaire *might* have said and it captures the spirit of what he *did* say in the circumstances.

However, the circumstances matter: they are crucial for interpreting what Voltaire meant by what he (did not quite) say. Briefly, as I understand it, Voltaire was coming to the defence of a young protégé of his, the philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius, who had written *De l'Esprit*, a book that Voltaire himself did not much care for. Neither (for their own reasons) did the state or the church; and on 10 February 1759 the book was burned in public – together with a work of Voltaire's, *Poème sur la loi naturelle*.[10] Thus, In (as it were) uttering the words "I disapprove of what you say", etc., Voltaire was linking arms with the author in a gesture of solidarity against the combined authority of church and state. *That* was the spirit in which he did not say what he famously said but nonetheless said something of the sort. You, however (along, it seems, with half the world), take him – and therefore 'the Enlightenment' – as giving *carte blanche* to anything, however vile, that anyone might publish, about anyone else, in any circumstances; including cartoons that target people at the opposite end of society from the powerful bodies who banned and burned Helvétius' book. I do not know if you are right about Voltaire. But I think you are dead wrong about Charlie.

Since, invoking the Enlightenment, you have given your take on Charlie, let me give you mine. You admire Charlie for daring to offend. I see it differently. Seeing it differently does not mean that I am not horrified at the massacre that was perpetrated at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January 2015. Nor does it mean that I think there is anything that can be said in defence of this crime. It means that I have a different perspective on the magazine and on the cartoons that poked fun at the prophet Muhammad. I see them through the lens of the question: How can people live together in difference? How do we say 'we'? (How do the French say '*nous*'?)[11]

What struck me at the time was the fault line, partly ethnic and

partly historical, that divides the French people. There were not many *aficionados* of the cartoons among France's North African Arab population, who have migrated to the motherland from the colonies. Now, French Muslims are a diverse group, not only socio-economically but also in the ways in which individuals see their relationship to Islam, and certainly there were exceptions to the generalisation I am making. However, this is not reducible to a question of 'belief'. Just as there are secular Jews, so there are secular Muslims: Muslims for whom Muhammed symbolizes their identity regardless of their views about the divine. If you were a Muslim, you did not need to be a believer (let alone devout) to fail to see the joke or to appreciate the satire when the Prophet was depicted naked in pornographic poses. You might tuck in to a plate of eggs and bacon on Ramadan but still feel solidarity with fellow Muslims in France, people with whom you share a common ancestry and a common historical experience at the hands of the French in Algeria or one of the other former colonies in the Maghreb. This is especially so if you live on the margins, in the *internal* colonies, as it were: *les banlieues*: the poorer suburbs around Paris and other major French cities. From this vantage point, each and every one of Charlie's pointed caricatures is liable to feel like yet another dagger aimed directly at your heart by an establishment from which you are effectively excluded.

It might be counter-intuitive to refer to Charlie as part of the French establishment. After all, there is nothing respectable that the magazine will not target. But, ironically, this is precisely the source of its status. Charlie is the unofficial jester of the republican court. It is France's freelance Shakespearean 'wise fool', self-appointed to play the role of lampooning the powerful and mocking the superstitious. Its origins lie in a venerable French republican tradition, one that looks back to the eighteenth-century genesis of this Enlighten-

ment state with its contempt for all things royal and clerical. Whether Charlie's relentless ridicule of Islam is true to that tradition or, on the contrary, a betrayal of its roots – a betrayal of the noble role of satire – is, however, moot. The magazine has its defenders and detractors. The former (like you, Norman) praise Charlie for its courage: for taking risks and breaking taboos despite multiple threats made against it over the years (not to mention an arson attack in November 2011). No one can dispute that the magazine has put itself at risk; it has done so by transgressing every conceivable line of good judgment, good taste and discretion. But is that courage? The question of whether it plays the part of republican hero or street bully depends on whom it chooses to pillory or taunt. The privileged or the disadvantaged? A minority on the margins or the group that is basically in charge? Those who are secure in their sense of belonging? Or those on the periphery, people who feel – with good reason – that they are excluded from the 'we' or '*nous*' of *La France* and the process of defining French identity?

Into this divided France the catchphrase 'Je suis Charlie' fell like an axe, cutting even deeper into French society – into the very crack or fissure to which Charlie itself has made a modest contribution with its caricatures of Muhammad calculated to 'offend'. I put 'offend' in scare quotes to indicate that the term is problematic. It purports to name a category but there *is* no category. 'Offend' is an umbrella term, a word under which a multitude of meanings shelter. In the public debate over free speech in general and *Charlie Hebdo* in particular, 'offend' has been stretched so thin that it covers almost any negative reaction, regardless of the nature of the provocation or the impact it has on the person or group 'offended'. But there is a world of difference between, say, affronting church-goers by using an obscenity, and, say, humiliating a group that is already demeaned,

accentuating their deep sense of alienation from the nation. Lumping together cases as different as these with the word 'offended' muddies the waters. For one thing, it treats all negative reactions as equal when they are not. For another, it tends to reduce them all to the lowest common denominator; for 'offend' is, after all, a rather mild term. Vicars are offended in Victorian novels (especially at teatime). But they *belong*, securely; and they *feel* they belong in the company of the people at whose words they take offence. A deep sense of alienation is the antithesis of a deep sense of belonging.

For those who felt nullified by Charlie, the slogan 'Je suis Charlie' was like a gauntlet thrown down at their feet. It conveyed a message sent from the centre to the periphery – just like in the bad old days of France's colonial empire: 'If you want to be one of us, identify with Charlie.' France closed ranks; and each of the 'unity rallies', which were held across France in the days following the slaughter in Paris, was a *mise en abyme*, a reflection of the French self to infinity. This was *fraternité* with a vengeance, *fraternité* for some but not for others. This is no way to say '*nous*' or 'we'.

However, in the 'unity rally' held in Paris on 11 January 2015, one person stood out in the crowd. I do not know his name. I know about him only from a photograph tweeted by Francois Picard, a journalist with the television channel France 24, which was forwarded to me in an email from the Junior Dean of my college. The photograph shows a lone individual holding up a large homemade placard made of cardboard with a hand-written message: "Je marche mais je suis conscient de la confusion et de l'hypocrisie de la situation."[12] It is not often you see a placard like this on a political demonstration! In a sea of mass certainty, it was an island of confusion.

Who knows exactly what the man with the placard had in mind in confessing his confusion. But it strikes a chord with me. As I see

it, the slogan 'Je suis Charlie' covered over a dilemma that we need to face today. Let me put this by way of saying where I stand on 'the right to offend'. On the one hand, I have no wish to live in a society where people are not free to speak their minds; where the giving of offence is automatically an offence in law; where we treat one another like spoilt children, walking on tiptoe for fear of treading on each other's delicate digits; where we are subject to the tyranny of the sensitive.[13] On the other hand, nor do I wish to live in a society where people who are vulnerable walk on tiptoe for fear of being trodden on by those who are stronger; where we are subject to the tyranny of the *in*sensitive, let alone the malicious. It is a conundrum, a conundrum we have to solve if we are to live together in difference. And the way to try to solve it, I believe, is to rethink the terms in which we think about the issues, in particular the terms 'rights' and 'offend'. I have spoken about the word 'offend' and why the term is problematic. What about the word 'rights?'

You do not need me to tell you, Norman, that we are indebted to the Enlightenment for the language of rights. But let us be clear about it. When I speak of the language of rights I do not mean rights that the law giveth and the law taketh away: entitlements that vary from time to time or from one jurisdiction to another. I mean *fundamental* rights, rights that we regard as universal and inalienable because they belong to us purely by virtue of our being human: *human* rights. The language of human rights transcends the language of legal rights, for laws come and go whereas human rights constitute an enduring standard by which to evaluate the rights that are granted or withheld in law.[14] Calling these rights 'human' and 'universal' points to this transcendence. As I say, this idea derives, without doubt, from Enlightenment texts on 'natural rights' and 'the rights of man'. But when we speak the language of rights today, do we mean what

the *philosophes* meant? Languages, Norman, evolve, even when their words stay the same.

Now, context – the circumstances within which a language develops and the factors that condition its use – might not be everything but it can furnish a clue; it gives us an idea of what the language in question is *for*. The point I am about to make owes a lot to the author of *Values for a Godless Age* and, more recently, *A Magna Carta for All Humanity: Homing in on Human Rights*. (The same person, by the way, was one of the architects of the Human Rights Act, which incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law.) I follow her lead, mainly because I find her argument persuasive, but also because she is my younger sister, and younger sisters are always right. (This, like freedom of expression, is a universal principle.) Francesca Klug distinguishes between two "waves" of rights: first, the 'natural rights' of eighteenth century texts, second, the 'human rights' of the Universal Declaration of Human (UDHR) and documents that spring from it. "The defining feature of the first-wave human rights movement," she explains, "is unquestionably liberty from state tyranny and religious persecution."[15] That is to say, against the background of religious wars between states and the combined power of the throne and the altar, there was a struggle for liberty for the individual: freedom from external restraints imposed from above. The context set the need and defined the struggle.

With 'second wave' rights, the context was considerably different. The dust had barely settled on the Second World War when, on 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the UDHR. At the time, the world was in a state of shock. This shock is registered almost at once in the preamble, with the second clause, which begins as follows: "Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the

conscience of mankind …" Barbarous acts were committed on all sides. But this clause refers, above all, to the murderous regime of the Nazis: the Holocaust waged against certain groups, including Jews, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals and other groups with a shared identity.[16] What made the Nazi Holocaust especially horrifying is that it went beyond warfare. The so-called Final Solution of the so-called Jewish Question was not a manoeuvre in a wider military strategy, a means to the end of victory over the Allies; it was an end in itself.

The core Nazi doctrine behind the mass murder of these groups was *lebensunwertes Leben*, 'life unworthy of living'. The repugnance felt at this doctrine lies at the heart of the UDHR. The preamble opens by repudiating it. The first clause reads: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". The inherent dignity of all: this is the antithesis of the Nazi doctrine of the inherent worthlessness of some. All who? All "members of the human family". Each right set out in the Declaration should be read in this light: humankind as a family, not as isolated individuals demanding their due. It is true that a human right is a claim that every person is entitled to make, but the engine driving the UDHR text is not personal entitlement: it is kinship and mutuality. Article 1 echoes the metaphor of the family: "All human beings … should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (or siblinghood, as we might say today). In other words, in the ethical vision of the UDHR (the primary post-war human rights text), mutual care or mutual respect comes first. I am tempted to say that ultimately it is this *respect* that puts the R in UDHR: it is the Universal Declaration of Human Respect. With second-wave rights, says Francesca Klug, the defining "*new* feature" – new not because it

replaces liberty but because it *places* it in a larger human vision – is community.[17] Community, I would add, based on the core idea that underlies every human right in the UDHR: the inherent dignity of all.

Dignity. Seen in this light, Norman, it seems perverse to speak about a right – if this means a *human* right – to offend. As I say this, I can see that you are bursting to interrupt. You want to remind me of something you said in your speech: "freedom of expression – the right to free speech – means nothing without the right to offend". But how exactly are you using the word 'right' now? Are you speaking the language of *human* rights, which is what I thought we were discussing, or *legal* rights? Consider: The law permits us, much of the time, to lie, to deceive one another, to betray a confidence, to be callous and cold-hearted, to laugh at someone else's misfortune. But do we, in the same breath in which we proclaim the right to life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and all the other freedoms enumerated in the UDHR, proclaim the *right* to lie, the *right* to deceive, the *right* to betray a confidence or the *right* to be callous and cold-hearted? No. Because this would devalue the language of rights – of *human* rights. Human rights are rights that flesh out the core concept of human dignity; they are rights that are *fundamental* to our dignity as human beings. If we devalue the language, we lose the plot: the ethical vision of mutual respect and mutual care. It is the same with the so-called 'right to offend'. Battering away at each other's identities – the way *Charlie Hebdo* battered away at Muslim identity via its caricatures of Muhammad – is not the way for the human family to cohabit on planet earth. It is no way to say 'we'.

In short, Norman, as regards human rights, what is left of the Enlightenment is the legacy of a language, along with a set of principles, especially the principle of individual liberty. This is a priceless gift – so long as we know how to receive it: how to make it our own.

Which means rethinking *their* thinking for our own day and age. Otherwise, this legacy becomes an obstacle to creating the good society.

I know, Norman, what you are saying to yourself: "At the end of the day, he has not solved his conundrum." I accept the point. More than that, I embrace it. Let me recall the riddle. "On the one hand, I have no wish to live in a society where people are not free to speak their minds; where the giving of offence is automatically an offence in law; where we treat one another like spoilt children, walking on tiptoe for fear of treading on each other's delicate digits; where we are subject to the tyranny of the sensitive. On the other hand, nor do I wish to live in a society where people who are vulnerable walk on tiptoe for fear of being trodden on by those who are stronger; where we are subject to the tyranny of the *in*sensitive, let alone the malicious." I added: "It is a conundrum, a conundrum we have to solve if we are to live together in difference." I should have said: endeavouring to solve the conundrum is *how* to live together in difference. Unlike a riddle in a puzzle book, we cannot find the solution on the last page. The conundrum sets a collective task. The task is ongoing: how to analyse the concept of offence and how to place civil liberties within a larger ethical vision of human rights. Confronting the task together in all our difference: this is the way to say 'we'.

Which brings me, Norman, to the feature of your speech that I find most troubling: the Us-Them structure of much of what you say. For example: "*we* have got to get this point across to *them*", "*we* have got to get *them* to understand". You protest that you are no racist. I am not sure what you mean by 'racist'. But in the kind of world in which we live today, a globalised world, a world in which the gravitational pull of Europe draws migrants and refugees from everywhere, a world of difference: in such a world, your version of

the Enlightenment has an inexorable drift towards an Us-Them way of talking. This is intimately connected to your dismissal of religion, which you see as opposed to reason, and which you equate with superstition and prejudice. I think, Norman, that you have a rather narrow view of what religion is. We need to talk about it. The trouble is, I have gone on too long. So, I am signing off. It will have to keep for another time.

III. Going beyond Nathan (or, Another time)

Norman has left the scene. But his way of talking about religion – placing it at the opposite pole to Enlightenment reason – is alive and well in the public debate about difference; and it seems to me to reflect, although in a distorted way, certain pronounced tendencies within the Enlightenment itself. In this final section, I shall touch on the category of religion as it affects the question 'What is left?' In a way, this section is the capstone to the paper. But, in another way, it is more like taking the lid off a volcano; for I intend to end by unsettling the category – and leaving it unsettled.

What is religion? What do we mean by the word? We have names for different religions: Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism … What makes each of them a religion? Is religious difference a difference within a single concept – religion – or is it the difference between different concepts that go by the same name, 'religion'; or what? In their study of Nepali religion, published in 2012, anthropologists Sondra Hausner and David Gellner begin by discussing the question of what religion is. The conclusion they reach is this: "It is time to break up the category 'religion,' and to recognize that whenever it is used as if it means only one thing, it is being misused."[18] It is time,

perhaps, to place 'religion' in scare quotes – like 'race' or 'offend' – as a warning that the word is unsafe.

But there was a tendency in the Enlightenment precisely to use the word 'religion' as if it means only one thing. And at the heart of what it was taken to mean was the idea that a religion is a creed: a set of propositions to which a believer gives assent. On the strength of this idea, religions make claims that can be compared with the claims made by science (or a science) – as if the statements were on the same logical plane.[19] (This assumption lies behind Norman's anxiety about schoolchildren being taught "myths – falsehoods – about creation instead of scientific facts".) If science is the work of reason, where does this leave religion in the Enlightenment? In the opposite camp: *un*reason; unless there is a version of religion that is arrived at by reason itself. And there was: Deism (a possibility that Norman overlooks). But what, when all is said and done, was Deism? It was God without religion – or without *revealed* religion (sacred scriptures, revelations and the like). Furthermore, having kick-started the world into existence, the God of Deism was largely surplus to requirements. It is a small step from 'not being at all needed' to 'not being at all': from deism to atheism. Be that as it may, the Enlightenment tended to see reason and (revealed) religion as polar opposites.

When, say, Judaism and Islam are slotted into this scheme, where do they show up? At the wrong pole, the one called 'unreason'. For they are *religions*, in the plural: not the universal, timeless religion of Voltaire and the deists, but particular, historical religions. They are based on revelation or sacred texts, the word of God, and the like, not the deliverances of reason. Hence, it is not surprising that the Enlightenment, like Norman, had its Us and Them. This is not to tar the entire period or movement with the same brush. It is only to say that the 'Us and Them' structure of much of what Norman said

was not without some basis in the long eighteenth century. Take, for example, Judaism. The historian Adam Sutcliffe in his book *Judaism and Enlightenment*, gives a measured assessment of how Jews were seen during this period. He points out that there were "shifts and ambiguities of Enlightenment thought concerning Judaism". [20] Nonetheless, the predominant role of Judaism was to be a foil for reason: "In much Enlightenment thought, the vital conceptual space of that which is most deeply antithetical to reason – Enlightenment's defining 'Other' – was occupied above all by the Jews."[21] Similarly, the Cambridge historian Sylvana Tomaselli calls Islam "one of the clearest embodiments of the 'Other' in the eighteenth century".[22]

Which brings me, at long last to *Nathan the Wise* (1779), the play by Lessing that gives its name to my paper. The action is set in Jerusalem during the Third Crusade. The plot is complicated, but the overall theme is straightforward: rapprochement between Muslim, Jew and Christian. The whole bent of the work is to promote religious tolerance across the board. This is the very opposite of Othering. And yet, and yet. This 'and yet' is what the word 'Beyond' in the title of my paper is intended to signal, although I am not sure that 'beyond' is the right word for what I mean. I appreciate what Lessing does with this play, I admire the figure of Nathan the Wise – especially since, when Saladin asks him whether he *is* Nathan the Wise he says "No", meaning not that he is not Nathan but (reminiscent of Socrates) that he is not wise.[23] By 'Beyond Nathan' I do not mean *rejecting* Nathan so much as *rethinking* him: rethinking his thinking (to adapt a phrase that is almost the refrain of this paper). You might think that the thing I want to rethink is the intriguing parable of the three rings in Act III. But I have something else in mind, something Nathan says in the previous Act when, for the first time, he encounters the Christian (the Templar). Declaring they must

be friends, he asks rhetorically: "Sind Christ und Jude eher Christ und Jude/Als Mensch?"[24] I am not altogether sure how to hear that. Samuel Ettinger hears it this way: "I am a man first and a Jew second and you are a man first and a Christian second".[25] Nathan goes on to say (in Peter Maxwell's translation): "oh if I've found in you/One more for whom it is enough to be/A MAN!"[26] To my ear, this suggests that you can be 'a man' – a human being – *as such*, as though the universal could, in theory, be purified of particularity; as if it could suffice; as if difference were a mere patina that overlays what is common.

Nathan was a good soul for his times, but we live in the twenty-first century. This is neither the era of the Crusades nor of the wars of religion. In our 'world of difference' we need another understanding of universal sensibility and a deeper principle than tolerance. We need a wiser Nathan or a Nathan for *our* times. A Nathan for our times would not say that he is human *rather than* Jewish, nor vice versa; he would say that he is human *by way* of being Jewish; that a Christian is human *by way* of being Christian, a Muslim human *by way* of being Muslim, and so on. That is to say, the way to think about these identities is that they are variations on the theme of being human, *where there is no theme apart from variations*: that is the crucial point.[27] A Nathan for our times would not posit a human universal that transcends human difference. He would proclaim difference *as* the universal. Each of us, he would insist, speaks with a particular accent that accentuates our common humanity; for humanity is necessarily inflected.

In short, going beyond Nathan means rethinking the word 'religion' inside the scare quotes. But if 'religion' needs scare quotes then so does the word at the diametrically opposite pole in the Enlightenment myth: 'reason': the word that, more than any other, stands for

the Enlightenment as a whole. For, in the Enlightenment myth, 'reason' and 'religion' are locked together in a mutually exclusive embrace. We need, that is, to rethink the binary 'reason *or* religion'. We need to do this for the sake of that being which is the best and most precious portion of what is left of the Enlightenment: *human* being.

Notes

1 This is a shortened version of the paper given at the symposium, 'What Is Left of the Enlightenment?', Lund University, 5–6 October 2017.

2 Nira Yuval-Davis et al, 'Introduction: Situating Contemporary Politics of Belonging' in Nira Yuval-Davis et al (eds), *The Situated Politics of Belonging* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 6.

3 James Schmidt, 'What Enlightenment Project?', *Political Theory*, vol 28, no 6 (December 2000), p. 736.

4 Ibid., pp. 737–38.

5 Ibid., p. 753.

6 Ibid., p. 753.

7 Norman's 'speech' is based partly on an amalgamation of two similar passages in my book *Offence: The Jewish Case* (London: Seagull Press, 2009), pp. 28–29, and 'In the Heat of the Moment: Bringing "Je Suis Charlie" into Focus, *French Cultural Studies*, vol 27, no 3 (August 2016), p. 227. "Enlightenment values are in peril" is from an op-ed by Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian*, 22 July 2005. "It seems we need to fight the battle for the Enlightenment all over again" is from on an op-ed by Salman Rushdie in *The Independent*, 22 January 2005.

8 The invitation letter placed the symposium in the context of "the broader debate about the good society". Citing a statistic about the number of refugees arriving in Sweden in 2015, it explained that the symposium "is prompted by a growing concern about the need to raise the public discussion about identity politics and human values to a new level."

9 Elizabeth Knowles, *What They Didn't Say: A Book of Misquotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 55; Burdette Kinne, 'Voltaire Never Said It!', *Modern Language Notes*, vol 58, no 7 (11943), p. 534.

[10] S G Tallentyre, *The Friends of Voltaire* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 196–7.

[11] From this point to the end of the section I draw on previous work, especially 'In the Heat of the Moment' (see note 7) and 'A World of Difference' in Antony Lerman (ed), *Do I Belong? Reflections from Europe* (London: Pluto Press, 2017, pp. 116–130.

[12] Image available online at https://twitter.com/francoisf24/status/554309559305904128 [accessed 9 May 2016].

[13] "I have no wish ... the tyranny of the sensitive": verbatim from my *Offence*, p. 30: see note 7 .

[14] Compare: "one of the original purposes of human rights ... was to develop norms by which to *evaluate* law" (Francesca Klug, *A Magna Carta for All Humanity: Homing in on Human Rights* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 29.)

[15] Francesca Klug, *Values for a Godless Age: The Story of the United Kingdom's New Bill of Rights* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 71. To clarify: "The use of the term 'waves' rather than 'generations' is intended to counter any suggestion of a rigid distinction between the two sets of rights. The metaphor is deliberately chosen to imply a sense of overlap and exchange which continues unabated" (Ibid., p. 133).

[16] F Klug, *Values*, pp. 10–11

[17] Ibid., p. xx.

[18] Sondra L. Hausner and David N. Gellner, 'Category and Practice as Two Aspects of Religion: The Case of Nepalis in Britain', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol 80, no 4 (December 2012), p. 973.

[19] Compare Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 40–41. Asad traces this conception of religion to the period prior to the Enlightenment, citing in particular Edward Herbert's *De Veritate* (1624).

[20] Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 6.

[21] Ibid., p. 5.

[22] In John W Yolton et al, *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 247.

[23] Act III, scene v.

[24] Act II, scene v. German text available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/nathan-der-weise-1179/12 (accessed 14 October 2017).

[25] In H H Ben-Sasson (ed), *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 744.

[26] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, ed George Alexander Kohut, trans Patrick Maxwell (NY: Block Publishing Co, 1917), available at http://www.archive.org/stream/nathanwisedramatoolessuoft/nathanwisedramatoolessuoft_djvu.txt (accessed 4 October 2017).

[27] The point here extends, of course, to other kinds of identity, not just identities that we call 'religious'.

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In Praise of Philosophie:
The Actuality of Radical Enlightenment

Richard Wolin

For those who doubt the Enlightenment's actuality, a first step might be, as Hegel once recommended, to peruse the daily paper in order to take stock of the anti-Enlightenment regimes that, in recent years, have acceded to power in Europe and elsewhere. During the 1990s, following the collapse of communism, it became fashionable to celebrate the so-called "third wave of democratization." From a contemporary effective, these aspirations seem both outdated and naïve. Instead, we have witnessed the ascendancy of a new form of *counterrevolutionary politics*, one whose overarching goal has been to effectuate the disenfranchisement and de-emancipation of citizens.

Following an unsuccessful flirtation with democracy during the 1990s, Russia, has returned unabashedly to autocracy. Vladimir Putin, who has served as president or prime minister since 1999, and whom some have described as new Tsar, took careful note of the so-called "Color Revolutions" that, during the early 2000s, rippled across Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East and pledged that nothing similar would happen in Moscow. To ensure this outcome, he proceeded to smash and criminalize autonomous civil society organizations such as the human rights group, "Memorial." By

actively seeking to undermine the political will of its democratic competitors in North America and the EU, Russia has reprised a role on the European political stage that it played for much of the nineteenth-century: viz., the guarantor and bastion of political reaction.

Turkey, whose commitment to secularism suggested that it might serve as a political beacon for the Islamic world, has pursued a parallel path. Under the regime of Recep Erdogan, who has been in power since 2003, it has become to all intents and purposes a political dictatorship.

Closer to home, the authoritarian regimes that, in recent years, have arisen in central and Eastern Europe have exposed the European Union's political fecklessness when it comes to upholding the democratic values that, since the Treaty of Rome (1958) and the establishment of the European Court of Human Rights (1959), have sought to preserve the legacy of European humanism. Here, the chief offender has been Hungary's Viktor Orban, who, since returning to power in 2010, has preceded to rewrite the constitution in order to effectively guarantee the rule in perpetuity of the party he heads, Fidesz. The resurgence of Hungarian nationalism has consciously taken its bearings from the ugly precedents that were set during the interwar years, when the Miklos Horthy regime allied itself with Hitler's Germany.

Orban's coalition partner Jobbik, has openly embraced the insignias and anti-Semitism of Hungary interwar fascist party, the Arrow Cross, has sought to outflank Fidesz to the right. Just last month, a new Hungarian far-right party, Force and Determination, emerged, in an attempt to shift the political balance even further away from the precepts civic freedom and rule of law. Hungarians who have championed these precepts, such as the Central European University founder, George Soros, and the philosopher and former Lukács-

student, Agnes Heller, have been targeted by anti-Semitic smear campaigns reminiscent of the darkest days of modern Hungarian history. Little wonder that, among the nations of contemporary Europe, Hungary has become a haven for Aryan supremacists and the pan-European Identitarian movement.

Of course, in an age of social media, parties like Fidesz and Jobbik have cultivated international alliances with like-minded far-right groups and organizations. Earlier this year, it came to light that a high-placed official in the Trump administration, Sebastian Gorka, has actively worked with Jobbik. According to recent reports, Breitbart news, which under the direction of former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, had cultivated strong ties to Europe's Identitarians, has plans to open up a branch office in Budapest.

The emergence and expansion of the authoritarian national populist regimes that I have just described constitutes a highly regressive phenomenon. From a moral and political standpoint, their proliferation represents a striking disavowal of one of the Enlightenment's main goals: the cultivation norms and institutions that are conducive to the development of individual and collective self-determination. Were one to characterize these recidivist political tendencies in the lexicon of the *philosophes*, one might say that they signify an intentional abandonment of Kantian *Mündigkeit* or autonomy in favor of a return to the mentality of the "subject" or *Untertan* that predominated under the ancien régime. Hence, the appositeness of the political metaphors I have chosen to characterize these developments: "*anti-Enlightenment*," "*de-emancipation*," *and* "*counterrevolution*." To quote the title of a recent book by Zeev Sternhell, what we are witnessing today – not just in Europe, but in United States under Donald Trump – is the disturbing triumph of "Anti-Enlightenment Tradition." [1]

In this respect, it is hardly an accident that, shortly following the National Socialist seizure of power, none other than the National Socialist Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment Joseph Goebbels remarked that "*The year 1789 is hereby effaced from history*." [2]

Turning to one of Mussolini's speeches from the same period, we read:

> Fascism rejects in democracy the conventional lie of political equality, the spirit of the collective responsibility and the myth of happiness and indefinite progress … All the experiments of the contemporary world are anti-liberal and the desire to exile them from history is supremely ridiculous … Now liberalism is on the point of closing the doors of its deserted temple… The present century is the century of authority, a century of the Right, the *fascist century*. [3]

Whereas it would be incorrect – not to mention unacceptably ahistorical – to maintain that champions of Counter-Enlightenment were proto-fascist, nevertheless, the fascists who rose to power in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s were, to a man, "enemies of the Enlightenment."

The regressive political trends I have described represent a conscious reprise of Counter-Enlightenment ideology. This has been especially true for nations like Poland, which, under Jaroslav Kaczynski's Truth and Justice Party, has sought to selectively implement the authoritarian values of "political Catholicism" in a manner reminiscent of 1930s clerico-fascism.

One of my main theses is that one way we can appreciate the import and meaning of the Enlightenment project – albeit, ex negativo – is by carefully scrutinizing recent attempts on the part of Counter-Enlightenment doctrine to reestablish a political foothold in the contemporary world.

In *Considerations on France*, the leading exponent of Counter-Enlightenment ideology, Joseph de Maistre, famously took aim at the "Rights of Man." In an adage that eerily anticipated the extremist discourse of contemporary European ethno-populism, or "differentialist racism," Maistre declared:

> I wish simply to point out the error of principle that has … led [revolutionary] France astray. The constitution of [1789] … has been drawn up for Man. *But there is no such thing in the world as Man*. In the course of my life, I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; I am even aware, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be a Persian. But, as for Man, I declare that I have never met him in my life. If he exists, I certainly have no knowledge of him. [4]

In his attack on the idea of "humanity" (or *l'homme*) as an other-worldly abstraction, Maistre took aim at the basic Enlightenment conviction that only a political order that is predicated on Reason, as opposed to the inherited prerogatives of tradition, custom, and lineage, may be considered "free." With characteristic eloquence, Rousseau gave a voice to this precept when he observed that, in forming the social contract, men and women exchanged the precarious qualities of *natural liberty* for a higher, moral *conception of freedom*. It is "moral" so far as, in keeping with the notion of popular sovereignty, it is predicated on the assent of all who are concerned.

It was in a spirit of counter-enlightenment that, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke famously observed that, "We are afraid to trust the stock of reason[s] in . . . man because we fear it is [so] small." Aping Burke, Maistre held that, in light of the Biblical afflictions of Original Sin, political self-rule was beyond humanity's meagre capacities." [5] Anticipating Ivan Karamazov's defense of the "Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Maistre viewed

the *executioner* as the sacrosanct guarantor of social and political order: as the only force capable of preserving human society from the temptations of godless anarchy and self-immolation. According to Maistre, "a Reaction must always be equal to the action… the very duration of your misfortunes promises you a counterrevolution of which you have no idea." For Maistre, "the executioner is an almost mystical figure, publicly shedding blood to purify the populace of sin and frighten all into obeying authority. . . There is a spiritual obligation for the state to use terror to enforce order." [6] Little wonder that, in fascist Italy, Mussolini adopted the lictor's axe as a political symbol.

Maistre's exaltation of "differentialist racism" resonated profound among representatives of the contemporary European far right. Front National founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen offered a memorable illustration of this credo when he avowed, "I love North Africans, but their place is in the Maghreb, not in Metropolitan France." Le Pen went on to adumbrate his infamous "concentric circle" approach to politics as follows: "I like my daughters better than my cousins, my cousins better than my neighbors, my neighbors better than strangers, and strangers better than foes." In sum: not equality before the law, but kinship and ethnicity, are the defining criteria of citizenship.

During the 1890s, Counter-Enlightenment political thought was fine-tuned and recast by proponents of "integral nationalism" such as Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras. Following Maistre, both Barrès and Maurras dismissed Enlightenment ideals as barren abstractions and sought to supplant them with the values of an ethnically homogeneous, authoritarian polity. As Barrès declared in *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*: "*I enter into revolt against laws that are not the laws of my race.*" In polemical opposition to Dreyfusards like Emile Zola and Jean Jaurès, Barrès alleged that universal claims to justice

or truth were chimerical. Instead, there were only a series of *differential, national truths*. In a classic illustration of the anti-Dreyfusard standpoint, Barrès concludes: "Nationalism means resolving all questions on the basis of French interests." [7]

Both then and now, integral nationalism's objective has been to replace the precepts of *civic nationalism*, as represented by the "Ideas of 1789," with the prejudice-laden and chauvinistic conception of *ethnic nationalism*. Its ultimate goal is to redefine citizenship in accordance with the precepts of ethnic belonging (*jus sanguinis*), as opposed to equality before the law (*jus soli*).

The recent trend toward de-emancipation and disenfranchisement is noteworthy, insofar as the idea of equal citizenship – which was codified on August 26, 1789 with the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" – was one of the Enlightenment's cardinal political legacies. The provision for freedom of conscience contained in Article 10 meant that, for the first time since the revocation of the edict of Nantes in 1685, Protestants could openly practice their religion. Two years later, in another watershed in the history of civic emancipation, citizenship rights were extended to include French Jews. With the proclamation of a democratic republic in September 1792, universal manhood suffrage was affirmed.

To be sure, the struggle for women's rights, as championed by the feminist martyr Olympe de Gouges, was less successful. The marquis de Condorcet was, albeit, a forceful advocate of sexual equality. Arguing with the precision of the mathematician that he was by training – after all, the proposition that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that two sides of an equilateral triangle add up 180° admit of no exceptions – Condorcet declared intrepidly that "*either no individual among mankind has true rights, or all have the same ones.*" He went on to assert that existing differences between the sexes were the result of the educational and

cultural deprivations that women were forced to endure. Ultimately, although women made gains in the area of property rights and the right to divorce, they were denied the prerogatives of civic equality. Finally, in a remarkable development, in 1794, slavery was abolished in the colonies.

There can be little doubt that, despite its various setbacks and *dérapages*, the French Revolution – a quintessential Enlightenment inheritance – provided the ideational template for modern political freedom. For decades, it has been a historiographical commonplace held that the French Revolution embodied the political actualization of the Enlightenment value scheme; that the political actors of 1789 had essentially put into practice the Enlightenment conviction that insight and emancipation, or knowledge and political freedom, go hand in hand.

Some 160 years later, it was with considerable reflection and forethought that the men and women who gathered in 1948 to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights trained their sights on the 1789 Declaration as their inspiration and model. As the 1948 Preamble states:

> Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation if freedom, justice and peace in the world … Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind; [consequently] the advent of the world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and beliefs in freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed the highest aspiration of the common people.

Nevertheless, Western political culture has changed qualitatively and dramatically since the eighteenth century. It is significant that,

whereas those who drafted the 1789 Declaration were all men, the 1948 delegation was led by a woman: Eleanor Roosevelt.

The major innovations of 1948 included a series of landmark provisions for social rights, a quintessential legacy of Scandinavian social democracy. Thus

> Following the demand-management policies of Wicksell and the Stockholm School, the Swedish SAP or *Social-demokratiska Arbetarepartiet* was able to combat unemployment more effectively than [either] the German SPD and the British Labour Party. The Scandinavian model [required] a reduction in class conflict and an accommodation between capital and labour on the basis of a profound extension of social citizenship and welfare rights [as well as] a collective commitment to full employment. Thereby, between 1930 to 1938, [this model] laid the foundation for what would become the modern West European conception of social democracy after the Second World War." [8]

The provisions for social rights are contained in Articles 22 through 25. Article 22 states that, "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realization … of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity." Article 23 certifies the universal "right to work," the right to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protections against unemployment. Article 23 also mandates, importantly, that "everyone has the right to form and enjoy trade unions." [end of the laboring society] The UN Declaration contains additional provisions that affirm women's rights and cultural rights.

The inclusion of provisions for social and cultural rights exemplifies the evolving character of the Enlightenment conception of freedom: the progression from civic rights, to political rights, to social

and cultural rights. This developmental trend was codified in TH Marshall's pathbreaking work of 1946, *Citizenship and Social Class*.

In all of these respects, today we remain the heirs of the Enlightenment doctrine of natural right, which during the18th century functioned as the lingua franca or philosophical crux of the "party of humanity's" program for democratic political reform. Voltaire employed it to appeal for freedom of worship in his influential *Treatise on Tolerance* (1763). Rousseau invoked it in the celebrated opening paragraphs of the *Social Contract* to indict the unfreedom of the *ancien regime*. And Diderot lauded it emphatically in one of the *Encyclopedia's* most widely circulated entries: "Do not ever lose sight of it [sc. natural right], or else you will find that your comprehension of the notions of goodness, justice, humanity, and virtue grows dim. Say to yourself often, 'I am a man, and I have no other truly inalienable *natural rights* except those of humanity.'" [9]

Hegel as *philosophe*

Since my chosen theme is "in praise of *philosophie*," at this point I would like briefly to gloss the lessons that Europe's most influential post-Enlightenment thinker, GWF Hegel, gleaned from the Enlightenment.

Hegel lauded the Enlightenment doctrine of freedom as an unsurpassable advance in Western moral and political consciousness, as the precondition for the development of a meaningful conception of selfhood. In *The Philosophy of History*, he defined modernity, memorably, as "progress in the consciousness of freedom." For Hegel, freedom meant "self–subsistence": "for if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not … I am free, conversely, when my existence depends upon myself." And in the *Philosophy*

of Right, In a direct riposte to Burke and Maistre, Hegel recognized that, owing to the French Revolution, men and women became *political subjects* "*in virtue of their humanity alone*, not because they are Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Germans, or Italians" (*Philosophy of Right*, para. 209).

Despite his various quibbles with the Enlightenment – quibbles that he detailed in the brilliant chapter on "Self-Alienated Spirit" in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* – by embracing self-consciousness as the pinnacle of Spirit, Hegel's understanding of the tasks and goals of philosophy perpetuated the legacy of the *philosophes*. In this respect, his conclusions were nothing if not Socratic. Hegel held that in order to accede to the truth or the "in itself" of things, thought must transcend "immediacy." "First takes" and "first impressions" are bound to be deceive. In order to surmount the deceptions of "appearance" or *Schein*, we must aspire to a higher order of reflection: a realm of "second order" concepts that, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel associated with the passage from "consciousness" to "self-consciousness": from the immediacy of "sense certainty" and "perception" to the more refined judgmental habitudes of "conceptual thinking." When perceived in this light, his philosophy may be interpreted as an extended commentary on the Socratic maxim, "The unexamined life is not worth living"; hence, as a thoroughgoing critique of modalities of spirit that remain trapped in "Otherness": "Being for Another" rather than "Being for Self."

With this insight, we have returned full circle to the Hegelian paradigm of "self-subsistence" or "self- positing subjectivity." In all of these respects, Hegel was acutely aware of the fact that, for freedom to be meaningful, it must pass through the moments of self-consciousness and self-reflection. Above all, it is Hegel's partisanship for reason (*Vernunft*) that distinguishes him from contemporaries like

Schelling and the Romantics who shirked the demands of conceptual thinking in favor of the intoxications of myth, religion, or the ecstasies of aesthetic self-oblivion.

Adorno: the Challenge of *Müdigkeit*

In the twentieth century, it was Theodor Adorno who, in exemplary fashion, perpetuated the Enlightenment legacy of critique. Adorno recognized that, with the demise of the Hegelian paradigm, the enterprise of systematic philosophy had also collapsed. His paratactic approach to philosophy, his attempt to reanimate the tasks of philosophy by thinking in "fragments" or "constellations" rather than in treatises, sought to do justice to the predicament of *Geist* in an age that, following the demise of the philosophical system, sought to uphold the requirements of conceptual rigor. For Adorno, the paradox of contemporary philosophy is that although it must acknowledge that philosophy's traditional claim to Absolute Knowledge proved chimerical, it must soldier on and keep the faith, lest mind surrender to facticity or sheer Being in its immediacy. On these grounds, he wonders aloud how we can preserve an "emphatic concept of truth" - the traditional philosophical claim to know the "essence" or "Being-in-itself" of things – in a post- Nietzschean age in which the guarantees formerly provided by systematic philosophy have lost their credibility.

Adorno found the answer to this conundrum in the Enlightenment spirit of "critique."

"Kant's famous dictum that the critical path is the only one still open to us belongs to those propositions constituting a philosophy that proves itself because the propositions, as fragments, survive beyond the system that conceived them." He viewed this paradox or

contradiction positively, as the lifeblood of philosophy. On this basis, he aptly denominated his own approach "negative dialectics."

In the essay in which he addresses this paradox in the greatest amount of detail, "Why Still Philosophy?" he offers the following instructive thumbnail sketch of what it might mean to read the history of philosophy critically and against the grain:

> Xenophon … strove to de-mythologize the forces of nature. Aristotle in turn saw through the Platonic hypostatization of the concept of Being as an Idea. Descartes convicted scholastic philosophy of turning mere opinion into dogma. Leibniz criticized empiricism, and Kant criticized the philosophies Leibniz and Hume at once; Hegel criticized Kant's philosophy, and Marx in turn criticized Hegel. For all of these thinkers, critique was neither mere window dressing nor mere adornment … It did not seek cover in a point of view that could be adopted *ad liberum*. Instead, its very existence lay in cogent argumentation … Critique alone and not the unthinking adoption of *idées fixes* or received wisdom, has laid the foundation for what may be considered the productive unity of the history of philosophy.

Despite Adorno's occasional enthusiasm for cultural reactionaries such as Oswald Spengler, Stefan George, and Ludwig Klages – who is positively cited in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – in the end, he expresses solidarity with the Kantian advocacy of *Mündigkeit*. In many ways, the dilemmas of postwar German democracy left him with no other choice. At first, Nazi atrocities and mass crimes were met by a wall of silence. It was a mentality that Günter Grass satirized in *The Tin Drum* where he had his fellow Germans engage in onion cutting ceremonies in order to learn how to shed tears; it was an attitude of psychological immobilism that the psychoanalyst

Alexander Mitscherlich exposed in his classic study, *The Inability to Mourn*. As we know from Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia," the refusal to work through a past trauma leads to emotional stasis and a neurotic incapacity to experience joy in the present. For these reasons, in the postwar, Adorno placed the theme of *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* or "working through the past" at the center of his work as a political publicist.

Adorno's embrace of *Mündigkeit* was his way of remedying the *Untertan* or "subject" mentality that, in Germany, was one of the enduring legacies of the authoritarian state. He developed this theme in detail in two essays from the 1960s, "Education after Auschwitz" and "Erziehung zur Mündigkeit."

The concept of *Mündigkeit* was the centerpiece of Kant's celebrated 1784 article "Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" "Enlightenment is mankind's emergence from self-incurred immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*]," observes Kant. "Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another." The hallmark of immaturity is a willingness to allow others to assume the role of "guardian." As Kant continues: "it is so easy to be immature. If I have a book that has understanding for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, or [an enlightened statesman who promulgates laws for me] … In all of these cases, I have no need to think… Others will take over the tedious business for me."

On these grounds, Kant proclaims that the motto of Enlightenment is: "Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding." In order to counteract the prevalence of so called enlightened despotism– a misnomer and contradiction in terms, if there ever was one – he prescribed *the public use of reason*: the cultivation of a critical public sphere in which norms of fairness and force of the better argument oppose naked authority and the deadweight of tradition as the

basis for political decision-making and collective will formation. As Theodor Adorno, invoking Kant's precedent, reminds us in "Education Toward Autonomy"

> Democracy is founded on the education of each individual in political, social and moral awareness… The prerequisite must be the capacity and courage of each individual to make full use of her reasoning power. If we ignore this fact, then all talk of Kant's greatness the becomes mere lip service … If the concept of a German intellectual tradition is to be taken seriously, then this is what we must strive toward, with the utmost energy and conviction. [10]

Although Adorno's observations were formulated some fifty years ago, they contain a powerful truth whose cogency and relevance has, today, become even more timely. *The best cure for the deficiencies of enlightenment is more enlightenment*. The best remedy for the "immaturity" of individuals and peoples is to enhance the civic, legal, and pedagogical bases of autonomy. The goal of democratic enlightenment must be the passage from a state of politically mandated dependency – the passive citizenship of the *sujet* or *Unteran* – to the prerogatives and constituents of *active citizenship*: norms whose pedigree one may be trace back to the Rousseauian and Kantian precept of *self-legislation*. In this way, we must strive to transcend the Eurocentrism and gender-constraints of the historical enlightenment in a cosmopolitan direction.

This means that enlightenment is not just for some or for a select few, but for all. As has become increasingly clear in recent years, aristocracies of wealth and finance are incompatible with the ideals of egalitarian and participatory democracy I have been describing. A dictatorship of financial elites – historically known as plutocracy – is irreconcilable with one of the most basic principles of democratic

self-rule: one that the ancient Greeks referred to as "isonomy" (equality). They were painfully aware that extreme asymmetries of wealth are by definition fatal to the ideal of democratic participation. On these grounds, the ancient Athenians conceived of the practice of "ostracism" in order to ameliorate imbalances of wealth that rapidly translate into imbalances of power and influence. Consequently, when viewed from a contemporary perspective, enhanced enlightenment must also mean a robust improvement in the mechanisms of democratic accountability, both nationally and globally.

Of course, in the 230 years since Kant wrote his pathbreaking 1784 essay, social and cultural circumstances have changed dramatically. Thus today, the Enlightenment's confidence that technological acceleration and the unrestrained mastery of nature will automatically lead to the improvement of the human condition stands refuted. The environmental catastrophes wrought by unprecedented levels of fossil fuel consumption are one salient manifestation of the limitations of the ethos of modern "productivism." In addition, the genocides and mass atrocities of the twentieth century stand as a painful reminder concerning advanced technology's potential for unprecedented brutality. At the same time, one must keep in mind that traditional, "low tech" methods of extermination continue to be used to devastating effect. In the case of the Ukrainian Holodomor, Stalin demonstrated that mass starvation, could be employed for genocidal ends. And as the more recent example of the Rwandan genocide of 1994, relatively primitive, hand held weapons, such as knives and machetes, can be prove equally devastating and effective.

In all of these respects, modern totalitarian regimes make the eighteenth-century autocracies and bureaucratic fiefdoms that Kant was forced to contend with look like child's play in comparison.

Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconse-

quential compared to this single ideal: *never again Auschwitz*. It was the barbarism all education strives against. One speaks of the threat of a relapse into barbarism. That is not a threat – Auschwitz was this relapse, and barbarism continues as long as the fundamental conditions that favored that relapse continue largely unchanged. That is the whole horror… The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is *autonomy*: … the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not playing along. [11]

Notes

1 Sternhell, *Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2012).
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3 Cited in Mazower, *Dark Continent* : *Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: 1999), 16.
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6 Maistre, *The Executioner*, trans. R. Lebrun (New York: Penguin, 2009).
7 Barrès *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (Paris: Félix Jouven, 1902), 33.
8 Sassoon, *One-Hundred Years of Socialism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 43.
9 Diderot, "Natural Law," in Hunt, ed., *The French Revolution and the Rights of Man* (New York: Bedford, 1997), 37.
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11 Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz," https://docs.google.com/file/d/0ByVW1G--4tQDVFlLS3dyWHlONoo/edit; accessed April 1, 2015.

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