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The Intellectual Foundation of the Enlightenment: Preparatory Factors and Philosophical Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Upon examining the history of philosophy, it becomes evident that since antiquity, societies have sought to determine "humanity's place and purpose in this world" and endeavored to formulate answers to these questions. However, it is observable that whenever societal values deteriorate throughout human history, solutions to rectify this decline begin to be pursued. The 18th-century Enlightenment Philosophy emerged in Europe during a period when individuals were regressing, particularly in intellectual terms, due to the oppressive attitudes of the Church and authoritarian institutions. Marking the decline of medieval thought and the rise of Renaissance ideas, the Enlightenment represents an era in which fragmented, divergent, and conflicting intellectual currents of the preceding century gave way to the systematization of thought. The Age of Enlightenment brought about profound transformations across numerous domains—from theories of reason and knowledge to social and political reforms, from conceptions of religion and God to aesthetics and ethics. These changes not only reshaped Europe but also generated repercussions that influenced nearly all of humanity. In this context, research demonstrates that Enlightenment Philosophy constituted an era of profound and comprehensive transformation for Europe in every respect. By embracing reason as its foundational principle, the Enlightenment marked a period of significant advancements in science and philosophy across 18th-century Europe. In this article, we will examine the nature of the Enlightenment, the philosophical movements underlying it, and the intellectual transformation it engendered.

Aydınlanma Çağının Entelektüel Zemini: Hazirlayıcı Faktörler ve Felsefî Dönüşüm

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ÖZET

Felsefe Tarihini incelediğimizde İlk Çağ'dan beri toplumlar 'insanın bu dünyadaki yerini ve anlamını' aramış ve bunlara cevap bulmaya çalışmışlardır. Ancak görülen odur ki insanlık tarihinde toplumsal değerler yozlaşınca bu durumu düzeltecek çözümler aranmaya başlar. İşte 18. yüzyıl Aydınlanma Felsefesi de Avrupa'da kilisenin ve otoritelerin baskıcı tutumlarından ötürü fertlerinin özellikle düşünsel anlamda geriye gittiği bir dönemde Orta Çağ düşüncesinin sona yaklaştığı Rönesans düşüncesi ile başlayıp bir sonraki asırda ortaya çıkan parçalı, farklı ve çatışmalı düşünce karakterinden sıyrılıp düşüncelerin sistemleştiği bir dönemi ifade eder. Aydınlanma Çağı akıl ve bilgi teorisinden, sosyal ve siyasal değişimlere; din ve Tanrı anlayışından, sanat ve ahlâk anlayışına kadar pek çok alanda değişimi gerçekleştirmiş ve bu değişim sadece Avrupa'yı etkilemekle kalmamış, yankıları neredeyse tüm insanlığı etkileyecek sonuçlara götürmüştür. Bu bağlamda araştırmalar gösteriyor ki, Aydınlanma Felsefesi, Avrupa'yı her alanda ciddî anlamda dönüşüme uğratmış bir çağ olmuştur. Aydınlanma Çağı, aklı kurucu ilke olarak benimseyerek 18. yüzyıl

Avrupa'sında bilimde ve felsefede büyük gelişmelerin olduğu döneme denir. Bu makalede aydınlanmanın ne olduğunu, aydınlanmanın felsefi arka planında hangi akımların olduğunu ve düşünsel anlamda nasıl bir dönüşüm yaşandığı üzerine bir inceleme yapacağız.

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INTRODUCTION

In English, the term "Enlightenment" is derived from the word "light", rendered as "enlightenment". In 18th-century France, this period was referred to as the "siècle philosophique" (philosophical century) or "éclairement"—achieved by the "lumières" (lights). The expressions "siècle des lumières" and "siècle éclairé" (enlightened century) were used interchangeably. In Italian, the concept is expressed as "Illuminismo", while in Spanish, it is termed "Illustración". In German, from 1750 onward, it was denoted by the word "Aufklärung". In Russian, the terms "prosvetit", "prosveshchenie" (enlightenment), and "prosvetitel" (enlightener) are derived from "svet" (light) (Buhr et al., 2006, p. 9).

But what does the Enlightenment—generally invoked to reference the philosophical, scientific, social, political, and ultimately cultural developments in 18th-century Western Europe—signify? What is to be illuminated, and who is the subject of this illumination? Is the Enlightenment a historical epoch or an ongoing process? Can we speak of a singular Enlightenment, or are there multiple forms of enlightenment? Should the Enlightenment be regarded as a positive milestone in world history, or should it be critically assessed as a negative phenomenon for humanity? In this article, we will seek to address these questions.

For some, the Enlightenment is framed as the root of today's societal ills, while for others, it is presented as the key to their resolution. Regardless of the perspective from which we evaluate it, our task is to critically examine whether this concept evokes a specific historical epoch or an idealized notion reflecting human practices.

1. What is the Enlightenment?

The Enlightenment is predominantly depicted in Western civilizational history as a struggle against dogmatic belief and its discriminatory, dehumanizing consequences—a struggle waged in the name of reason and liberty (Wokler, 2016, p. 241).

One of the most frequently cited definitions of the Enlightenment is as follows: "It refers to a distinct historical manifestation of the emancipatory movement undertaken by the bourgeoisie as a class to assert itself, along with the corresponding ideologies and literary output that emerged from it" (Buhr et al., 2006, p. 7). In truth, this definition, like all definitions, has imposed limits on enlightenment. However, today, the boundaries of enlightenment can be transcended either through the adjectives placed before it or through the efforts of the opposing camp, which seeks to resist attributing enlightenment solely to the bourgeoisie and instead strives to expand the conceptual confines of the term.

Throughout the 18th century, the term "Enlightenment" was understood not merely as a period but as an ongoing process encompassing a series of activities (Schmidt, 2005, p. 242). What distinguished this era—the Age of Enlightenment—was the concept of "reason", with all its variations and diverse applications. Reason was not so much a historically or socially determined concept as it was a universal one, carrying an essence that was valid for all social actors, nations, and individuals. According to Cassirer, reason in the 18th century was not so much an inheritance as an achievement—a kind of energy discernible through its mediation and effects, a power of analysis that sought to dissect all factual phenomena down to their simplest forms and roots in common belief, ultimately leading this dissection toward a concrete whole. Most importantly, reason represented the capacity to critique and question everything grounded in—and legitimized by—the sacred triad of revelation, tradition, and authority, a triad inherited by the Enlightenment (Çiğdem, 1997, p. 20).

The power of human reason does not lie in providing an escape to a transcendent, otherworldly realm; on the contrary, it manifests itself in thoroughly measuring this framework and finding its

homeland entirely within it. Here, the concept of reason takes on a new meaning, opposed to that of the 17th century. For the metaphysical systems of the 17th century—for Descartes and Malebranche (1638–1715), Spinoza, and Leibniz—reason was the domain of eternal truths, truths common to both the divine mind and the human mind. Thus, in what we know and recognize through reason, we directly perceive the trace of God. Every act of reason guarantees that we partake in the divine essence, opening to us the intelligible world, the supersensible realm. In contrast, the "reason" of the 18th century assumes a far more modest meaning. In this century, reason is no longer seen as containing innate ideas or a priori knowledge that reveals the absolute essence of things. Reason is not a treasury of thought, a vault where truth is carefully and securely stored like a precious ornament; rather, it is at best the universal and fundamental cognitive power that leads to the discovery, determination, and consolidation of truth. This act of consolidation is the seed of truth's development and an indispensable condition for any genuine completeness. The entire 18th century conceives of "reason" in this sense, not as the immutable repository of knowledge, principles, and truths, but as an energy, a force that becomes intelligible only in its affect and effect. What reason is and what it is capable of can be measured not in its outcomes but in its functions. Its most crucial function lies in its ability to connect and disentangle all things through its power. It dismantles and dissects everything previously accepted based on revelation, tradition, and authority, analyzing every presumed self-evident truth down to its simplest elements. Yet, following this process of dissolution and analysis, the effort of reconstruction begins. Reason must establish a structure that accounts for the whole. This twofold movement of thought—analysis and synthesis—reveals the concept of reason in its most perfect form: reason is not applied to being but to action (Cassirer, 1951, p. 12).

The primary aim of the Enlightenment was to liberate humanity from the "old order", which was believed to be fundamentally "evil" and "oppressive", as represented by myth, prejudice, and superstition—and by extension, institutionalized religion, which was seen as their producer and perpetuator—and to usher them into the "order of reason", regarded as inherently "good" and "emancipatory". Within the intellectual framework of the Enlightenment, the order of reason encompassed all elements considered a priori good for all humanity. Consequently, every philosophical and social project had to be grounded in reason and the principles embodied by it. This is why the Enlightenment is also referred to as the "Age of Reason". However, due to differing interpretations of concepts such as reason, science, knowledge, religion, God, natural law, and despotism, Enlightenment philosophers diverged radically from one another on many philosophical, social, and political issues (Hampson, 1991, p. 11). Yet these differences did not prevent them from forming an intellectual family (Çiğdem, 1997, pp. 13–14).

The Enlightenment as an era exists only insofar as certain beliefs, modes of thought, and behaviors can be meaningfully distinguished and identified as distinctive features of the period (Hampson, 1991, p. 11). Historians of philosophy argue that what is understood by the term "Enlightenment" encompasses ways of thinking and behavior that permeated many aspects of life (Hampson, 1991, p. 12).

Enlightenment philosophy emerged in the 18th century, particularly in France, during the so-called Age of Enlightenment. It was a movement led by a group of philosophers who operated within an environment shaped by their unwavering faith in the functional power of reason. This movement sought to critique existing values and establish a new social philosophy. Its distinctive character arises from the fact that it was not purely philosophical in the strictest sense. The Enlightenment laid the intellectual foundations of "modern society", both through its indirect economic and social consequences and by establishing the groundwork for what is termed the "rational revolution" (Çiğdem, 1997, pp. 15–16).

Just as the French Revolution of 1789 remains the fundamental and originary cause of contemporary political divisions due to its social and political consequences, the Enlightenment must be understood as the defining line of both general intellectual attitudes and, more specifically, the theoretical and philosophical differences witnessed in certain disciplines—including philosophy itself—leading to divergent worldviews. The Enlightenment persists today both as independent principles and as elements embedded within various ideologies. Like the French Revolution, which, as a product and in some sense a producer of modernity, introduced historically irreversible formations into the structure and functioning of the contemporary world, the Enlightenment must be regarded and conceptualized as one of the pivotal turning points that shaped the modern world. As a factor that intensified the consciousness of modernity and played an undeniable role in the philosophical and ontological self-understanding of the contemporary world, its influence remains indispensable (Çiğdem, 1997, pp. 16–17).

The Enlightenment refers to a cultural epoch, a period of scientific discovery and philosophical critique, as well as a philosophical and social movement that spanned the latter half of the 17th century to the first quarter of the 19th century in Europe. It was distinguished by the efforts of leading philosophers to establish reason as the absolute guide and ruler of human life and to illuminate the human mind and individual consciousness through the light of knowledge (Cevizci, 2000, p. 46).

This movement first emerged in England during the 17th century with the renowned philosopher John Locke and several deist thinkers. It later flourished in 18th-century France through the works of Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780), Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1717-1783), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Montesquieu (1689-1755), Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789), and other Encyclopédistes. Concurrently, it developed in Germany through the contributions of thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), representing a broad intellectual movement that reshaped European thought (Boas, 2009, p. 796).

When comparing the modes of thought in the 17th and 18th centuries, there is no radical divide between these two periods. The new ideal of knowledge in the 18th century was developed by building upon the preliminary frameworks of 17th-century logic and scientific doctrine, particularly as advanced by Descartes and Leibniz. While there is indeed a difference in their modes of thinking, this difference does not signify a fundamental transformation; rather, it manifests itself merely in a shift of emphasis. Priority is now given to the particular over the universal, to phenomena over principles (Cassirer, 1951, p. 22, 2000, p. 46).

The 17th century upholds the rigor and coherence achieved especially by French classical culture. Like French classicism, this century reinforces the demand for unity and seeks to extend it to all domains of thought and life. This demand is evident not only in science but also in religion, politics, and literature. The maxim of this era is *"un roi, une loi, une foi"* ("one king, one law, one faith"). By the 18th century, the absolutism inherent in this notion of unity had weakened. This century introduces various limitations regarding unity, yet these limitations do not pertain to the very essence of thought itself. For synthesizing multiplicity into unity continues to be regarded as reason's fundamental function. Grasping empirical data within a rational order and mastering them through rational means is impossible without invoking reason's unifying function. To recognize and understand a multiplicity means to place its constituent elements into a relational framework such that, starting from a determinate point, we can trace them according to a fixed and universal rule. This discursive (chain-like) form of cognition had already been established by Descartes as the fundamental form of mathematical knowledge (Cassirer, 1951, p. 23, 2000, pp. 46–47).

In the Aristotelian perspective, which defines man as zoon politikon (political animal), there is an assertion of a natural condition, whereas the Stoic and Enlightenment viewpoints introduce an obligation and imposition—an ethical framework, a forward-oriented collective aspiration, and a social design. The Stoic philosophers, who emphasized human responsibility within society and laid the early foundations of the Enlightenment outlook, articulated the rights and duties of the individual in the community while synthesizing the passive, enduring human type into a unified whole. They were the first in the history of thought to demonstrate that the most perfected individuality exists within sociality, and the most perfected sociality within individuality. This materialist, rationalist, positivist, and determinist philosophy envisioned, in ethics, a complete integration of the individual and society (Timuçin, 2000, p. 51).

The Enlightenment thinker appears as bound to nature as a Stoic. The Stoic notion of strict adherence to nature forms the core of a critical perspective directed particularly at an order that turns its back on nature and exploits it increasingly. In Enlightenment thought, the concept of the "state of natüre", as pivotal in Locke and Hobbes, evokes not so much a historical reality as a critical stance. Criticism lies at the heart of Enlightenment thinking. Though not as explicitly as in Kant, every Enlightenment philosopher advocates critique and is prepared to employ reason precisely for this purpose. Indeed, well-exercised reason naturally gravitates toward critique. There are two types of rationalism: one that declares all our being and all existence as deriving from God, and another that regards the active power of rationality as a necessity for life and knowledge. The Enlightenment predominantly aligns with the latter, emphasizing reason as an instrumental force in shaping human understanding and societal progress (Timuçin, 2000, p. 53).

From a broader perspective, the Enlightenment was not only an intellectual and cultural movement of the 18th century but also a philosophical one. At the same time, it can be regarded as the intellectual culmination of a series of events and developments that had been transforming European society, particularly since the beginning of the so-called "modern" period around the 1500s. These social, economic, and cultural developments, as we shall see, were intertwined with both long-term processes of "modernization" and the emergence of the West's self-consciousness as distinctly "modern". With the Enlightenment, the West developed a strong—though not uncontested—belief in the superiority of its thought, institutions, and values. It took pride in the successful completion of several modernizing developments, including the rise of the modern state and the capitalist market economy. Intellectually, autonomous spheres of science, art, and morality had now separated from what had once been an all-encompassing religious worldview, which had made no such clear distinctions. The West had begun to perceive itself as the modern West (West, 2020, p. 25).

This analysis shows that the Enlightenment fundamentally changed the way people thought by making reason a critical tool and an emancipatory force. It connected ancient philosophical traditions while creating modern intellectual and institutional frameworks. Its legacy endures not as a monolithic doctrine, but as a transformative ethos that reconciled individualism with social progress and critique with reconstruction. The Enlightenment's enduring relevance lies in its paradoxical nature — both a product of its historical era and a timeless challenge to dogma, inequality and unexamined authority. Although we have provided several definitions of the Enlightenment, our research indicates that definitions of this concept vary widely. Therefore, the definitions presented here may be regarded as a compilation of the different meanings associated with the term Enlightenment.

2. Pre-Enlightenment Social-Political-Economic and Religious Background

It can be observed that there is a vast period between the starting dates of the Middle Ages (375) and the Early Modern Period (1453). During this long era, the emergence of different ideas that would transform the social and political order was inevitable. The legal and political order of the Middle Ages

was defined by feudalism. Feudalism is a system that considers the land and the peasants living on it as the property of a single individual. Political power is monopolized by landowners, who sustain themselves through the rent paid by peasants (Şimşir, 2018, p. 99).

Christianity in medieval Europe ceased to be merely a faith; it also formed a social community and an organized world, deeply influencing medieval society, culture, philosophy, economy, and politics (Guryeviç, 1995, p. 99).

Economic progress in the 11th century was a pivotal point in European history. Feudal conditions began to change during this period, and advancements occurred in many fields. Europe's economy revived, and the continent started opening up to global trade. This was followed by the birth of new cities and a new social class. The people of these new feudal cities fought for their rights and freedoms against ideologies detached from human and worldly life, bringing forth a new worldview. Meanwhile, the medieval nobility and the Church continued to defend traditional values. The divine-state ideology and church dominance characteristic of the Middle Ages permeated every aspect of life, controlling all spheres of European existence. By the 15th century, Europe was about to witness new intellectual and scientific movements.

In Europe, where capitalism replaced feudalism, despite numerous wars, progress in modern science, technology, and geographical discoveries did not halt. While geographical discoveries became a source of Europe’s wealth, the invention of the printing press facilitated the widespread dissemination of critical thinking. Colonialism, briefly defined as the occupation, exploitation, and settlement of foreign lands, was initiated by the West through geographical discoveries. Colonization provided the necessary financial support for Europe’s ongoing wars while introducing new trade practices and necessitating reforms in international law.

The Enlightenment followed the Renaissance movement of the mid-15th century, the Reformation of the 16th century, and Cartesian philosophy, which emerged in the mid-17th century (Aydın, 2022, p. 4). The understanding of reason developed by humanist and skeptical thinkers during the Renaissance, particularly in the 16th century, as well as the Cartesian understanding of reason established by Descartes and his followers in the 17th century, laid the groundwork for 18th-century Enlightenment thinkers’ concept of rationality and their belief in the power of reason (Duman, 2006, p. 126).

By the late 18th century, Europe had undergone profound transformations. The dominance of humanism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and ultimately, Enlightenment philosophy, ushered in an era of scientific, technological, social, economic, and commercial reforms. During this early modern period, which was fundamentally shaped by evolving economic and commercial relations, thinkers who interpreted these changes through social and philosophical lenses—employing approaches that sought to explain humanity and nature within their contemporary context—left their decisive mark on the age. The legal foundations for reshaping individual and societal life were established through seminal documents, including the Magna Carta (1215), the Petition of Rights (1628), the English Bill of Rights (1689), and the American Declaration of Independence (1776). However, these developments failed to achieve the comprehensive, universal scope necessary to enable a nation to holistically address its economic, social, administrative, and legal transformations. It is widely accepted that this comprehensive transformation first materialized in the modern era with the French Revolution (1789) (Külcü, 2003, p. 9).

Many natural scientists and economists have observed that “Enlightenment Philosophy” first emerged in England, then spread to France and Germany. This new world order connected natural sciences with social life and philosophy with economic activity. In the 17th century, philosophers and scientists such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Kepler were able to disseminate scientific truths across nearly

all domains of life. Until this period, most scientists worked across multiple fields, including physics, mathematics, philosophy, and astronomy. However, by the 18th century, specialization became necessary, leading to a deeper focus on specific subjects and approaches better adapted to contemporary needs and conditions (Külcü, 2003, p. 9).

As a social movement, the Enlightenment first appeared in Western Europe during the 17th century, when it was also conceptually formulated. These developments emerged from specific historical conditions and converged with several fundamental causes: the expansion of international trade, the discovery of new territories, and scientific breakthroughs all laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment. The 18th-century philosophical movement, known as the "Enlightenment Philosophy", lasted nearly a century. It began in England following the fall of the Stuarts and the "Glorious Revolution" (1688), which created opportunities for significant development in both spiritual and material interests. The movement then spread to France, where under the political, religious, and social oppression of the Ancien Régime, it assumed a more critical and oppositional character. Finally, it reached Germany, the third major cultural center, where it merged with the intellectual tendencies of Leibniz and his school (Vorlander, 2004, p. 442).

The Enlightenment launched a radical critique against concepts and institutions that obstructed progress, successfully transforming them. In pre-Enlightenment European societies, lifestyles were dominated by religious institutions, with economic life and political power concentrated in the hands of specific individuals and classes. The Enlightenment empowered people to govern themselves and participate in the social and political structures that directly affected their lives- a completely new way of existence for humanity (Bobaroğlu, 2002, pp. 18–19). Many individuals transitioned from being mere subjects to becoming autonomous citizens who assumed authority, duties, and responsibilities in social life.

It seems that the Enlightenment will go back as far as the Renaissance, which was already in decline by the 12th century. Every historical synthesis must be somewhat like the bed of Procrustes; it is stretched, shortened, cut up, and cut down to fit (Hampson, 1991, p. 15). On the other hand, history without synthesis is divided into countless, meaningless fragments.

A history of philosophy should take into account the characteristics of each philosopher's thought, the cultural background of each period, and the effects of each philosophical doctrine on its predecessors and successors. Similarly, we can only make sense of the Age of Enlightenment when we view it from a broad perspective as a process that still influences us today, along with the changes that began with an intellectual shift in the Middle Ages.

3. Philosophical Foundations of the Enlightenment

The philosophy of the Enlightenment was founded on reason, knowledge, and moral values. The following can be said about the general tendencies of the Enlightenment philosophy: It relied on human reason rather than traditions, authorities, and idols to understand, explain, and manage nature, society, and the environment. It saw man as the goal, individualized man, believed in the idea that man had a good nature, overvalued development, progress, and science, reduced the source of knowledge to experimentation and sensation, adopted materialism and mechanism as views of existence, defended naturalism and the immanence of nature, rejected transcendence to nature and matter, and stated its impossibility. It supported deism and natural religion in theology and, based on this, adopted natural and secular law and the design of a liberal society.

3.1. Reasoning

Reason is humanity's most fundamental capacity. It enables us to think and act correctly. According to Enlightenment philosophy, tradition and religion are not the only guides of human behavior; reason is the only guide, and it is not assisted by any other source. According to Enlightenment thinkers, a number of factors prevent the intellect from functioning normally and from fulfilling similar functions in all human beings. The institutional and cultural environment is the primary negative factor. They argue that the Church, the state, superstition, ignorance, poverty, and prejudice corrupt reason. They believed that priests, and therefore the Roman Catholic Church, had the most harmful effect because they instilled false beliefs in people and emptied their hearts and pockets. This manifests their greed, selfishness, bigotry, and brutality rather than their spirituality. At the root of the Church's harmful influence was Christianity, of course, with its transcendent and supernatural structure that elevated faith and revelation above reason (Cevizci, 2008, p. 26).

Some view the Enlightenment's understanding of reason as an important break in the evolution of the human species, while others view it as a reactionary thought with no originality other than the secularization of the heritage inherited from the past. However, a middle ground can be found, and it can be said that the Enlightenment's understanding of rationality is both a rupture and a continuity with previous periods (Duman, 2006, p. 123).

In the process from the Renaissance to the end of the 18th century, it is seen that in the formation of scientific and philosophical theories, reason gained importance over faith, rational knowledge over religious knowledge, and rational forms over traditional forms of thought and behavior. In addition, the idea of the individual and individual rights, individual freedom, autonomy, and moral autonomy developed as elements of the same process (Duman, 2006, p. 124).

Enlightenment thought is a morality, a morality of rationality, it proposes a more orderly and balanced way of life for human beings and teaches them that they can establish this way of life with reason. Enlightenmentism is rationalism, but it is a rationalism that is quite different from the rationalism of Descartes and the rationalism of the classicists, which has gradually lost its effectiveness; it is a rationalism that does not exclude emotions on the verge of sentimentalism. A good education can very well ensure that reason is used for the good of society. The Enlightenment's greatest foundation is a good education. Enlightening education will, of course, be libertarian education in the full sense of the word, an education realized in freedom. Free thought is a force that makes education productive (Timuçin, 2000, p. 52).

However, the Enlightenment did not intend to be an advocate of freedom in the full sense of the word. At a time when free initiatives were going too far and bringing unhappiness to people, the Enlightenment thinker would also examine the problem of freedom. Even if we can achieve the happy outcome through free education, freedom needs to be renegotiated in order to achieve this happy outcome. This includes the control or restriction of freedom in the name of freedom. It is necessary to organize life in such a way that the freedom of one does not lead to the captivity of another. According to the Enlightenment philosophers, freedoms can only be realized within the framework of scientific predictions.

It is fair to say that Enlightenment thought was rooted in a radical individualism rooted in Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, and reinforced by Locke's empiricism (Cevizci, 2008, pp. 30–31). This led Enlightenment philosophy to sanctify the individual.

Enlightenment liberalism aims, at least ideally, to liberate the individual not only politically but also intellectually and morally. In its view, political governments should be concerned only with worldly matters such as life, liberty, and property, rather than with realizing spiritual goals such as the salvation

of the soul. There is no absolute truth that public authority, whether spiritual or secular, can impose or dictate to the individual. For the Enlightenment, matters of faith and moral conviction should belong to the private sphere, where individuals are free to believe what they wish. Enlightenment liberalism also seeks to make individuals economically free, freeing them from the impediments of private enterprise. Enlightenment thinkers replaced the idea of a free market, free from the interference of the state, the church, and the nobility, with a market in which individuals are alone with their talents, skills, abilities, and virtues in the process of realizing their interests (Cevizci, 2008, p. 32). Accordingly, life is not a process directed upward, according to one's position on a hierarchical ladder of existence, away from the world and toward the true owner of existence, but a mechanism programmed for success and worldly wealth.

3.2. Scientificism

Enlightenment thought is the genesis of modern science, the scientific revolution, whose foundations were laid in the Renaissance. The significance of the new astronomical theory*, first articulated by Copernicus in 1543 and developed by Galileo nearly a century later, is not that it shows what is really around what, but the perspective it creates on the relationship between man and nature. With this development, which shook the foundations of Greek and Judeo-Christian cosmology, nature and the universe were seen as a field of inanimate matter to be observed, analyzed, and controlled by humans (Duman, 2006, p. 125).

In Newtonian physics, nature or the universe is perceived as a kind of "machine" that operates according to certain laws. Accordingly, in nature, which is composed entirely of matter, the movements of matter in time and space are determined by universal laws that are the same everywhere and can be expressed mathematically. As the human mind discovers the workings of the natural laws of the world, beginning with careful observation and confirming its conclusions with further observation and experimentation, it will be possible to unravel the mystery of nature. Hampson puts it this way: "Nature was no longer a sum of diverse phenomena, a mixture of mysterious influences, a canvas covered with the incomprehensible symbols of an unquestionable God, but a system of intelligible forces. God was a mathematician whose calculations, however infinitely complex, were not incomprehensible to the human mind. What was not yet known could be discovered in time. Nature and its laws were hidden in darkness. God created Newton, and everything was illuminated" (Hampson, 1991).

While the Enlightenment relegates religion to the background, it emphasizes science as the best realization of reason itself. If religion and metaphysics are the archenemies of the Enlightenment, science is its greatest hero. For the Enlightenment, which depends on science and technology, science is above all the measure of true enlightenment and the key to the necessary change in mentality. Because science embraces "reason as a functional tool for reading the book of nature and society", and a scientific worldview adopts a rational perspective free of religion and superstition. At the same time, science has the potential to improve and enhance human life in its practical aspect, as it brings comfort and convenience that ensure happiness in the world. A significant number of Enlightenment thinkers who viewed science in this light were interested in science or practiced a particular science and wrote about it. La Mettrie was a doctor, d'Alembert and Condorcet were mathematicians. Montesquieu and Diderot were thinkers who wrote about science, and Kant was a philosopher who attempted to justify modern science. Voltaire, on the other hand, had the scientific knowledge to compare Descartes' theory of the sky with Newton's theory of the sky, and to devote himself to introducing experimental philosophy and

* The heliocentric system, which states that the Earth revolves around the sun, as opposed to the geocentric system, which states that the sun revolves around the Earth.

Newtonian physics to his country and the world. In the eyes of Enlightenment thinkers, who saw science as the source of progress, the servant of reform, the only means of human perfection, and the only way to rid the world of suffering and unhappiness, science could even cure death (Cevizci, 2008, p. 27).

Enlightenment scientificism, which believes that a society based solely on science can be a truly free and rational society whose members live happily, that the more one knows about the world, the better human life becomes, and that the real cause of pain, misery, and unhappiness is ignorance, wants science for the power and authority it provides (Cevizci, 2008, p. 28). Bacon's "Knowledge is power" is almost the symbol of Enlightenment thinkers. Nature has been conquered, and now, after this conquest, it is necessary to discover human things, human sciences, and social sciences.

3.3. Dogmatism and Anti-Religion

The Enlightenment also devalued local customs, traditions, and prejudices, the development of which depended more on historical conditions and characteristics than on the influence and activity of reason. Because of its humanism and rationalism, it asserts that what matters is not to be English or French, but to be an individual or a human being bound to all other human beings by a bond of brotherhood. The principle of universalism underlies the ideas that science is the only source of knowledge, that reason determines what is true, good, and beautiful, and that humanity and history progress toward the positive. According to this principle, the absolute and universal can be found through human reason and taught to all other human beings through education (Çüçen, 2006, p. 32).

The most important place in the Enlightenment is occupied by the attack on classical religion or theistic belief, the war on superstition. Almost all Enlightenment thinkers declared war on popes and priests, that is, on Christianity and its God, and replaced classical theism or Christianity with either deism or atheism.

The Enlightenment argued that beliefs should not be accepted based on the authority of priests, sacred texts, or tradition, but on the basis of reason, filtered through the filter of reason. For this reason, Enlightenment thinkers tended to lean toward either atheism or deism, which aims to promote a primarily enlightened system of morality, stripped of supernatural and miraculous elements, and the idea that the universe is a rational system and therefore can be understood by the human mind (Erdemli, 1990, p. 100).

Anthropological findings reveal primitive human belief systems about metaphysical beings (spirits, angels, demons) and magical practices. However, the rational critical approach of Enlightenment thought argued that such supernatural concepts lacked a scientific basis. The modern scientific paradigm shows that the universe consists only of natural phenomena and that the physical realm of existence -the system of material objects- is governed not by theistic intervention but by the deterministic operation of scientific laws.

Despite this atheistic and materialistic attitude, especially from the second half of the century onward, philosophers, risking the dangers of unbelief at the popular level, turned to deism, believing that atheism was too strong a medicine for ordinary people. Voltaire, for example, argued for the necessity of a religious faith that would keep the community spirit alive, create a sense of patriotism, and foster virtue, and for this reason, he said that a God should be invented, even if God did not exist at all. The God in question is deistic, a watchmaker God who sets in motion Newton's machine of the universe, a God who does not intervene in the world in any way. This kind of idea of God led to the clergy and the church ceasing to be a public authority.

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The Enlightenment thus presents us with a fundamental paradox: while it sought to liberate humanity through a rational critique of religious dogma, it also recognized the social necessity of some form of transcendent faith. The movement's radical attack on traditional theism produced not outright atheism but rather a rationalized deism - a "watchmaker God" who created an orderly universe governed by natural laws and then withdrew from active intervention. This compromise position reflected the philosophes' pragmatic understanding that while educated elites might embrace atheistic materialism, society at large needed moral foundations.

Ultimately, the religious legacy of the Enlightenment lies in this transformation of divinity from an active, interventionist force into an abstract principle of cosmic order-a transformation that simultaneously dethroned ecclesiastical authority while preserving religion's ethical function. This delicate balance between radical reason and social conservatism characterizes the Enlightenment's enduring influence on modern secular thought, where the tension between rational skepticism and the human need for meaning remains unresolved.

CONCLUSION

When we look at the definitions of Enlightenment in general, we see that this era historically refers not only to the 18th century, but to a process that continues with the end of the Middle Ages. It is with the Renaissance that people break away from their traditions and try to make sense of life with their reason. The 18th century is a period when this reached its peak. This is why the 18th century is called the "Age of Enlightenment". This era emerged as an alternative to the way of thinking and living of the Middle Ages. The Renaissance can also be seen as a bridge between the Middle Ages and the New Age. As a transitional period between the Early Ages and the Middle Ages, the Middle Ages bear the characteristics of both periods. However, in this century, there are new searches and new research, so ideas are not yet mature. In the 17th century, the ideas that were formed were gathered and organized, and systematic world views began to emerge. The ideal of the 18th century is the increase and progress of knowledge. In this respect, much importance is attached to reason. Enlightenment thinkers believed that they would be freed from living dependent on traditions, thanks to their overconfidence in reason, that human beings would determine their destiny, and that the individual was therefore free and independent. They criticized all institutions that had emerged throughout history through the filter of reason and sought alternative solutions.

It should be noted that such a breakthrough in the history of philosophy did not only occur in the 18th century. In the 5th century BC, Greek sophists in the First Age realized the Greek enlightenment. The sophists emerged as a result of the crisis in Greek society caused by the intensity of wars and migrations. When society was shaken, the spiritual values that sustained it were also shaken. In order to live in such an environment, the Sophists opposed beliefs and traditions. Protagoras, one of the sophists, argued that "Man is the measure of all things" and believed that there could not be a fixed thing since human senses change every moment, and argued that knowledge would change from person to person. To put it briefly, the sophists criticized the tradition, religion, and morality of their time. In this way, the order of the society and the state at the time was further disrupted, and there was a social change towards a selfishness that left man alone.

We should add that research shows that there was not one but several enlightenments. Whether it is called enlightenment or not, every society, every nation, and even every individual has realized and will realize its enlightenment and perfection. Because society cannot progress without criticism.

Constructive criticism, that is, a solution proposal offered as an alternative to what is criticized, will ensure change and development. Since the social structure is a moving field, even those who keep their place will fall behind.

Since the 18th-century Enlightenment, which we examine in this article, attached great importance to reason, it naturally included those who criticized this period. A philosophy based on reason must also criticize reason. Because when everyone dares to use their reason, it is very common for different ideas to emerge and criticize each other. Making reason and experiment the sole source of knowledge distanced people from religious authority, and as a result, society began to search for a new order of life, a new worldview. Many intellectuals who sanctified nature, starting with the Renaissance, became materialists, atheists, deists, or naturalists.

Although Enlightenment thinkers ultimately expressed different views, their common goal was to advance in the light of science and create a reasonable society by prioritizing reason. They believed that human beings can be happy when they are in harmony with reason, which regulates nature. According to the Enlightenment, reason can reach the truth of everything, even religion. Thus, the Enlightenment put religion under the pressure of reason and tried to replace natural religion with Christianity.

Although Enlightenment thinkers differed in their perspectives, they were generally united in emphasizing the importance of natural reason. Reason should be able to be perfected without any religious or moral influence. In Kant's words, it is necessary to "have the courage to use one's reason".

The 18th-century Enlightenment movement opposed and openly fought against established beliefs, traditions, the educational system, and authority. The echoes of this struggle affected not only Europe but almost the entire world.

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