

Enlightenment and the Foundations of Democratic Modernity

1 24 Jan. Progress; or the Enlightenment's two Ways of Improving the World

Argument: That there is a basic dichotomy within the Western Enlightenment of Radical Enlightenment versus moderate mainstream which entailed two distinct conceptions of progress, one democratic, republican and also purely secular (or Unitarian) the other monarchical, aristocratic and theologically grounded.

2 31 Jan. Democracy or Social Hierarchy? The Political Rift

Argument: By 1770, what Voltaire called the 'guerre civile' between the unbelievers, meaning the conflict between the radicals and the providential Deists who defended the existing order had become an open political rift in which Frederick and Catharine the Great directly intervened. On one side the Enlightenment was henceforth openly committed to democracy, and the overthrow of monarchy and aristocracy, the other side to stopping it.

3 14 Feb. The Problem of Equality and Inequality; of the Rise of Economics

Argument: Radical Enlightenment was committed to the principle of equality in moral and political philosophy from the outset and moderate mainstream Enlightenment to defending privilege and inequality. But the economic aspects of this began to be explored only after the rise of economics in the 1760s and 1770s through the work of Turgot and Adam Smith. The result was two conflicting conceptions of economic and social theory, with Diderot, d'Holbach and their disciples reacting against 'classical economics'.

4 21 Feb. The Enlightenment's Critique of War and the Quest for 'Perpetual Peace'

Both enlightenments developed a critique of war and militarism (though only Radical Enlightenment rejected colonialism). The radical critique was not only wider-ranging, however, but also appeared to be the more cogent in that it could offer concrete grounds as to why countries might stop fighting each other and agree to a United Nations that could effectively resolve disputes: namely, that democratic republics genuinely governed in the interest of the majority, as opposed to monarchical-aristocratic states governed in the interest of the few, would have no reason to fight each other.

5. Two Traditions of Moral Philosophy in Conflict

Argument: Spinoza's key moral principle that a purely secular morality detached from all theological criteria must be based on the principle of equality and equity and the actual needs of

men in society, and that there are no virtues not based on society's needs, was taken up by Diderot, d'Holbach, Helvetius and their disciples but strongly opposed, in different ways, by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and Kant.

6. The Enlightenment's basic Dichotomy as a War of Philosophies

While Voltaire always regarded the fight against intolerance and fanaticism as his Enlightenment's first priority, there was never a time when he was not also highly conscious of the need, as he saw it, to fight radical thought which he usually calls *le Spinosisme* or just refers to as 'Spinoza', for short. If he was right that the entire tradition built by Diderot, d'Holbach, Helvetius and their disciples descended directly from Spinoza, then he was surely right in thinking that the way to break modern secular democratic republicanism is to block Spinoza's arguments against theism, free-will, teleology in history, fixity of species, and the conception of divine Providence.

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