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## ENLIGHTENMENT'S FAITH IN HUMAN CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES

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In this article I present an argument for the thesis that one of the most significant revaluations of the Enlightenment was the creation and popularization of faith in the effective shaping of fate by man himself. In every example the Enlightenment had been referring to the creative possibilities of human reason. However, major differences occurred in understanding this very reason and its application in the praxis between the main representatives of the period. In my remarks I recall just a few of selected representatives of the English, Scottish and French enlightenment philosophy. The broadening of that list with other names, including the representatives of other nations, would allow probably to present much more diversified variants of this Enlightenment faith which since that period is a specific distinguishing mark of modernity.

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A common denominator of the discussions concerning the specificity of contemporary western culture comes in the form of a conviction that it largely constitutes a legacy of what had been created and popularised in the Enlightenment period. Controversies arise, however, as soon as the question has to be addressed of what it was exactly that appeared and spread during that period which was capable of exerting such an influence on contemporary culture. While providing answers to this question, much depends on whether or not one shares in the traditional disbelief in the capacity of humans to independently shape their fates in a way that does not require

seeking happiness beyond the temporal realm. While the belief in such creative capacities did not arise exclusively with the Enlightenment, yet it was in this period when it gained such important and influential supporters that not only was it possible to openly hold such a belief, but one could actually also demand its presence in public life, including the political, educational and academic institutions. In the present considerations I refer to but a few of those fighting for such a right, but their full list is both longer and much more diverse.

### Different perceptions and representations of European Enlightenment

Before venturing to present the aforementioned fighters I would like to point out some of the vital differences in the ways of perceiving and representing the Enlightenment period in the existing literature. It is already the setting out of the chronological frame of the period that generates ample controversy. Even though it has been customary to associate the period with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in some countries – such as England – it started as early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, while others joined later – France, for instance – in the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Quite clearly, in formulating such temporal frames much depends on what one assumes to be associated with the Enlightenment. This can be attested on the basis of such studies of this period as Gertrude Himmelfarb's book: *Roads to Enlightenment*.<sup>1</sup> One may also be convinced by studying such selections of source material for the history of German Enlightenment philosophy as the one compiled by Tadeusz Namowicz, Karola Sauerland i Marek J. Siemek.<sup>2</sup> Even in Paul Hazard's *European Thought in the*

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<sup>1</sup> Its author sets out the goals of the study in the following way: "This book is an ambitious attempt (more ambitious than its length warrants) to reclaim the Enlightenment – from critics who decry it and defenders who acclaim it uncritically, from postmodernists who deny its existence and historians who belittle or disparage it, above all, from the French who have dominated and usurped it. In reclaiming the Enlightenment, I propose to restore it, in good part, to the British who helped create it – who created, indeed, a very different Enlightenment from that of the French." Cf. G. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity. The British, French, and American Enlightenments*, New York 2004, p. 3ff.

<sup>2</sup> Its chronological boundaries are delimited by the thought of Leibniz, on the one hand, and the critical philosophy of Kant, on the other; on the substantive side, the limit is set by fragments of Christian Wolf's *Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, while on the other side it seems set by early 19<sup>th</sup> century considerations of Johann N. Tetens concerning *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache*

*Eighteenth Century*, which constitutes a compendium of knowledge clearly focused on but a single century, one finds references to individuals whose lives and achievements came in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., I. Newton or J. Locke).<sup>3</sup> The same is also true when it comes to such accounts of the philosophical thought of that period which focus on one main inspiring figure – such as in the case of Johnathan Israel's monograph *Radical Enlightenment*, which ascribes such a role to B. Spinoza – who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

Even greater controversies come to the fore when one is pressed to pick those thinkers that constitute the intellectual figureheads of the Enlightenment period. Even though some names come up with certain regularity (such as J. Locke, D. Hume, Voltaire or D. Diderot), they are yet attributed with a diverse set of roles that they supposedly played in creating key aspects of the Enlightenment. This has been demonstrated by G. Himmelfarb's *Roads to Modernity* or Alastair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* – in these monographs a different selection of the period's radicals has been singled out. The former sees the Enlightenment as associated with such British dissenters as Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, Thomas Paine and William Godwin.<sup>5</sup> While the latter

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*und der Schrift*. Cf. T. Namowicz, K. Sauerland, M.J. Siemek (eds), *Filozofia niemieckiego Oświecenia. Wybrane teksty z historii filozofii*, Warszawa 1973.

<sup>3</sup> When it comes to the first among those philosophers and scholars, P. Hazard writes that he saw “mathematics in the service of Natural Science” and deposed it to its proper place. While in his *Inquiries concerning Human Understanding*, Locke spelled out a new direction of thought, and the multitude of his followers made him one of the chief ideologues to shape his century. Cf. P. Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass. 1973, p. 131 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford University Press, 2001. I consider this author's position to be inaccurate both with respect to the question of Spinoza's role (he was a marginal figure at the time, whose ideas provoked revulsion rather than endorsement) and when it comes to the differentiation within the contemporary forms of radicalism. For further reading on the radicalism of Enlightenment philosophers (and not only philosophers), cf. W. Weischedel, *Die philosophische Hintertreppe. Die grossen Philosophen in Alltag und Denken*, München 1973, p. 132 ff.

<sup>5</sup> According to G. Himmelfarb “It might even be said that these radicals belong more to the history of the French and American Enlightenments than to the British. Paine spent much of his adult life in America and France, and was a member not of the British Parliament but of the French National Convention. Even after his imprisonment during the Terror and the withdrawal of his French citizenship, he remained in France, returning finally not to England but to America, where he died. Priestly was awarded an honorary seat in the National Assembly but chose to live in America rather than France, and he too died in America. Price and Goodwin did live out their lives in England, as ardent sympathisers of the French Revolution.” Cf. G. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity. The British, French, and American Enlightenments*, Knopf, New York 2004, p. 94 ff. The author reminds us in

takes the main radicals of the period to include D. Diderot and A. Condorcet in France, D. Hume and J. Bentham in England, A. Smith in Scotland, or I. Kant in Germany.<sup>6</sup> Another group of the period's radicals is distinguished by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self*, which mentions such philosophers as J. Bentham in England, as well as C. Helvétius, P.T. Holbach and A. Condorcet in France. Taylor sees their precursors as coming from the 16<sup>th</sup> century puritan movement in Britain, such 17<sup>th</sup> century English philosophers as Th. Hobbes and J. Locke, as well as French philosophers such as Descartes.<sup>7</sup>

The list of radicals of the period composed by Max Weber takes a yet different shape. In *Protestant Ethics*, he mentions four strands of ascetic Protestantism, i.e. 1. Calvinism (in the form assumed in Western Europe); 2. Pietism; 3. Methodism; 4. Sects originating from the Anabaptist movement (such as Zwilingianism or Armianism). In the light of his dissertation, the representatives of those movements had to compete for pole position among the greatest radicals of the era. In the end, the author is willing to award it to such English puritans as the Quakers, or non-conformists, who included such figures as George Fox (founder of the Society of Friends), Robert Bacley (theologian and preacher), as well as Richard Baxter (nonconformist theologian). They were connected not only by choosing the most radical forms of asceticism (the kind of ascetic practices they promote would oppose any attempts at gathering worldly goods), but also by supporting such forms of work which constitute “an exercise in ascetic virtue, a proof of his state of grace through his conscientiousness, which is expressed in the care and method with which he pursues his calling.”<sup>8</sup> This constitutes a somewhat

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her monograph that “Jeremy Bentham is usually included among these radicals. But at this time he was neither a radical nor a public figure of note. He opposed parliamentary reform at home, to say nothing of republicanism, and derided such French revolutionary measures as the confiscation of church property and the Declaration of the Rights of Man.”

<sup>6</sup> According to this author, when it comes to this circle of enlightenment thinkers, an especially important role was played by French philosophers, who proved instrumental in propagating the Enlightenment project of morality based on “emotivism” (“Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”). See A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame 2007, p. 11 ff.

<sup>7</sup> According to this author, what bound together this diverse society was “first, modern inwardness, the sense of ourselves as beings with inner depths, and the connected notion that we are ‘selves’; second, the affirmation of ordinary life which develops from the early modern period; third, the expressivist notion of nature as an inner moral source.” Cf. Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge, Mass. 1989, p. x.

<sup>8</sup> “Not labour in itself, but rational labour in a calling. In the Puritan concept of the calling the emphasis is always placed on this methodical character of worldly asceticism,

paradoxical combination of conscience understood in the Augustinian way (let us remind ourselves that Aurelian Augustine was active in late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries) with such a modern understanding of thinking, which does not emphasise the attainment of supernatural objectives (such as the salvation of the soul), but rather focuses on the satisfaction of certain conditions within the temporal domain as well as on the sticking to certain principles – such as work efficiency combined with a great degree of modesty in consuming the fruits of this work. This does not entail a negation of the value of wealth. Quite the contrary, it leads to its actual rehabilitation, and even to a commandment to become wealthy (“He who is poor in his station should bear it, but if he swore to remain so it would be the same as if he swore to remain sick or to maintain a bad reputation”). Both the theoretical considerations of the puritan theologians and their practical applications on the part of those listening to their sermons and following the commands of the protestant ethics lead to the triumph of the “spirit of capitalism” as well as to such a form of rationalism that can be translated into a calculus of gains and losses.<sup>9</sup> It seems important to note that Weber’s perception and representation of the roads to modernity refers not only to religious, cultural and mental transformations, but also to economic, political as well as legal changes.<sup>10</sup> Such multi-faceted accounts of the transformations of European culture play an especially significant role in arbitrating the arguments over the role which the Enlightenment played in this process. It seems indisputable that those transformations occurred in significantly diverse cultural domains and that they were faster in some of them, and slower in others. Among those domains whose transformations were most rapid, I am inclined to count the Enlightenment philosophy, although the pace of change proved different in different countries.

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not, as with Luther, on the acceptance of the lot which God has irretrievably assigned to man.” Cf. M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and The Spirit of Capitalism*, London 2001, p. 108 ff.

<sup>9</sup> According to M. Weber, such ideas gave rise to the modern “economic man.” However, the greatest success of this man “came only after the peak of the purely religious enthusiasm was past. Then the intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue; the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness. Then, as Dowden puts it, as in Robinson Crusoe, the isolated economic man who carries on missionary activities on the side takes the place of the lonely spiritual search for the Kingdom of Heaven of Bunyan’s pilgrim, hurrying through the market-place of Vanity.” *Ibidem*, p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> This is visible especially in his main work, i.e., *Economy and Society* – cf. M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley 1978.

## Enlightenment faith of the English

Multiple factors have contributed to the fact that it was the English who initiated this great endeavour of persuading the men of the West that they are capable of succeeding in temporal life – of gaining wealth, security, happiness, as well as other values and measures of this world – and that they do not have any great need to seek help from the great Christian theologians or institutional support of the Christian churches. Some of the circumstances under which this kind of faith emerged, strengthened and spread, were spelled out in George Macaulay Trevelyan's *Social History of England*. The book claims that the first symptoms could be spotted not in the buildings of the great English universities – Oxford and Cambridge (jealously guarding their traditional privileges and in many ways more orthodox than the pope) – as well as not so much in the works of the famous English theologians and philosophers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (such as Thomas More) – as in the thinking and actions of some of the English rulers of that century (such as Henry VIII, who did not back down from a confrontation with the papacy and performed a true revolution in the country) and in the works of the now obscure English writers of the era – such as for instance Simon Fish, who published *A Supplication for the Beggars* (in the first decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), which constituted an accusation against the clergy of deceit, laziness, bigotry, vagrancy and many other sins big and small.<sup>11</sup> All this paved the way for English anticlericalism, which would initially be aimed at the “old papists” (proponents of the episcopal supremacy of Rome), and later at “new papists” (proponents of the supremacy of the Church of England over the consciences of all the English).

One of the most prominent among the social critics was John Locke, the author of *Letter on Tolerance*. He had a significant impact on the fortification of the opinion held by the enlightened Englishmen that they are capable of specifying the demands of their own conscience, as well as of setting the principles conditioning everyday life and cooperation with others. In the preface to the *Letter*, its English publisher – William Popple – provides an

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<sup>11</sup> “The conclusion reached by the pamphleteer is that the clergy, especially the monks and friars, should be deprived of their wealth for the benefit of the King and Kingdom, and made to work like other men [...] Such crude appeals to lay cupidity, and such veritable coarse anger at real abuses uncorrected down the centuries, had been generally prevalent in London under Wolsey's regime, and at his fall such talk became equally fashionable at Court.” Cf. G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, London 1944, p. 103 ff.

unequivocal answer to the question: what does an Englishmen need to make such judgements – what he needs is “absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty.”<sup>12</sup> Locke himself was of the opinion that one necessary condition of any such freedom comes in the form of a separation of the Church and state – “If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising.”<sup>13</sup> In justification for this claim, Locke asserts that “the commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own civil interests,” while Churches were established in order to promote piety and point to the ways leading to God: “no man by nature is bound unto any particular church or sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God.” Therefore, in his view, “no member of a religious society can be tied with any other bonds but what proceed from the certain expectation of eternal life. A church, then, is a society.” When it comes to the question, what the proper relations of Church and state (a secular institution) should be, Locke would unequivocally say: neutral, i.e., “the magistrate ought not to forbid the preaching or professing of any speculative opinions in any Church because they have no manner of relation to the civil rights of the subjects.” This is what a reasonable relation between the two institutions should look like. The reasonable nature of the actions of the secular powers should be attested not only by toleration of Churches in public life, but also by the fact that “no opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate,” as well as by not tolerating atheists (“Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist.”).

Subsequent generations of English fighters for the human right to take human fate into one's own hands included Thomas Wolston, a man of a scholarly turn of mind. “He took his degree at Cambridge and decided to go into the Church, but the promise of a brilliant career was nipped in the bud when he flung himself body and soul into the cause of heterodoxy. There was Middleton, another Cambridge man, who, having taken his D.D., was

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<sup>12</sup> “Now, though this has indeed been much talked of, I doubt it has not been much understood; I am sure not at all practised, either by our governors towards the people in general, or by any dissenting parties of the people towards one another.” Cf. J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in: *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, New Haven 2003, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218 ff.

appointed librarian to the University. Next came Tindal [...] Tindal became a Catholic, but reverted to Protestantism, only to pass thence into the ranks of militant deists. About the same time, another individual began to attract notice, a little man, short and obese, and anything but well bred, and very uncertain of his spelling. He started as a glover, but gave that up and became a tallow-chandler. His name was Thomas Chubb. Following him, we have Thomas Morgan, a philatelist, or truth-lover; and Peter Annet, a schoolmaster, who wrote for the crowd... Pamphlets, brochures, learned works – they flooded the market with their aggressive compositions.”<sup>14</sup> They would be removed from offices, have their writings burned, and be publicly scorned or imprisoned – all this coming to nothing as their attacks would be renewed – attacks against the Anglican church, its hierarchies and benefits, against the Church in general, as well as such an interpretation of the life of Jesus as given by the gospels, and especially against the idea of divine intervention.

### Enlightenment faith of the Scots

Considerable differences between the English and the Scottish have long been acknowledged to exist. They could not be elided by combining them into one state in 1707 (henceforth referred to as Great Britain), nor by their subsequent cooperation on a number of vital issues (such as suffrage rights for those citizens who wanted and were able to use their liberties). The already mentioned historian of English culture reminds us in his work that in spite of the legal-formal conjunction of both nations, the social life of those countries “followed distinct paths and economic and physical obstacles in the way of more international intercourse.”<sup>15</sup> The same author does also mention some other Scots of that period, to whom he refers as “geniuses” and claims that they had an impact not only on the whole of England but also on the continental philosophers.

<sup>14</sup> P. Hazard, *European Thought...*, p. 60 ff.

<sup>15</sup> “Communications were hindered not only by tariffs but by the state of the Great North Road. London was nearly a week’s journey from Edinburgh, and the English counties that lay nearest from the Border were the most primitive and the most hostile to the Scots. In religion, in law, in education, in agricultural methods, in the mutual relations of classes, Scotland showed no tendency to approximate the English example, still less to give any lead to England. [...] And apart from all questions of politics and religion, the national and personal pride of the Scot appeared to the unimaginative English preposterous in conjunction with their poverty. [...] And the Scot, when at every turn he encountered this vulgar scorn, only became more silent and more dour” G.M. Trevelyan, *Social History...*, p. 418 ff.

One of them was David Hume, the author of the *Treatise on Human Nature*, *Inquiries Concerning Human Understanding* as well as of a six-volume *History of England*. It was only the last of these books, however, that scored a circulation jackpot during his lifetime. It contributed to the establishment of Hume's standing as a sceptic as well as an opponent of the Roman-Catholic church (already in 1761, the book was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*). In the last years of his life, he authored *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, whose first edition came out in 1777. Initially, the book did not arouse much of an interest. Only after the publication – in the same year – of the essays *On the Immortality of the Soul* and *Of Suicide*, as well as of the autobiographical letter entitled *My Own Life*, was the attention of the readers, also in the ecclesiastic circles, brought to the charge of atheism. Much seems to point to another possibility, however, namely that he was closer to the Enlightenment deism (to which many figures subscribed in that period) than to the present-day atheism (popular only among very few of the Enlightenment-era thinkers).

The foundations for such a classification are provided by the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. The considerations contained by them entail a picture of religion as a phenomenon that does not have its sources in divine deeds, but rather in less than commendable human practices. It is not an accident that it was to be implanted in children's minds – as they have receptive and sensitive minds which are not capable of picking up the religious inconsistencies and shadowiness. "To season their minds with early piety is my chief care; and by continual precept and instruction, and I hope too, by example, I imprint deeply on their tender minds an habitual reverence for all the principles of religion [...] Having thus tamed their mind to a proper submission and self-diffidence, I have no longer any scruple of opening to them the greatest mysteries of religion."<sup>16</sup> In effect, people reaching a mature age "give often their assent, not only to the great truths of theism, and natural theology, but even to the most absurd tenets, which a traditional superstition has recommended to them. They firmly believe in witches; though they will not believe nor attend to the most simple proposition of Euclid."

Creations of any such superstitions and ridiculous doctrines do constitute proofs of human creative capacities. It is not, however, with the creative capacities of this sort that Hume and other Enlightenment thinkers were concerned. What they were counting on was the human capacity represented by the innate reason and they were looking for such aspects of order in reality

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Cambridge 2007, p. 7 ff.

which were in tune with this reason. Not only were they seeking, but actually finding it, which is attested in the already mentioned *Dialogues*. What they claim is that it is “nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain” – and God is nothing more than the primary cause. It goes without saying that such a concept of God could not be accepted by any of the Christian churches.

Such acceptance was not something Hume would be counting on. This seems to be proved by his subsequent publication – *Natural History of Religion*. It constitutes one further step in the analysis of the traditional creation of religions, as well as in the unravelling of its good as well as dark sides. He formulated the thesis that the original and most natural form of natural religion was not monotheism but polytheism or idolatry and that “the Gods of all polytheists are no better than the elves or fairies of our ancestors, and merit as little any pious worship or veneration,” while going further one finds out about the “origin of theism from polytheism” (adding that “the vulgar, in nations which have embraced the doctrine of theism, still build it upon irrational and superstitious opinions”). Hume does also point out such internal and external inconsistencies of Christianity, as for instance that “the Virgin Mary, ere checked by the Reformation, had proceeded from being merely a good woman, to usurp many attributes of the Almighty,” as well as the fact that great crimes have been committed in the name of esteemed ideals (“the greatest crimes have been found, in many instances, compatible with a superstitious piety and devotion”).<sup>17</sup>

Adam Smith was also among the few Scottish geniuses mentioned by G.M. Trevelyan. In his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, we can also find the pronouncement of faith in human creative capacities, which allow for humans to satisfy their vital needs. In order to defend this faith, A. Smith did not need to successfully challenge those beliefs that make humans turn away from the values and goods of this world, and focus on the realms postulated by various religious traditions. What he did need was to persuade the reader that without their earthly activity focused on temporal ends, nothing of value could be accomplished. They do not even need to impersonate God by attempting to encompass all the conditions of successful actions through their limited minds. In Smith’s view, this question is tackled not by an invisible God (whose support of

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. D. Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, A. and H. Bradlaugh Bonner, London 1889, p. 25 ff.

some sort he did not discount), but rather the “invisible hand of the market,” or to be more precise the activities and cooperation of all engaged agents, i.e., planners, producers, tradesmen and consumers. In this way, the author does not choose individual wisdom, or the wisdom of any particular social group (such as priests, philosophers, or academics), but puts emphasis on aggregate wisdom, or to be more precise – the wisdom of particular nations.

Answering the question: how can this wisdom be measured – he points to the annual output of every nation, which “originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consist always either in the immediate produce of that labour, or in what is purchased with that produce from other nations.”<sup>18</sup> While addressing the question of what makes some nations wealthy and others poor, he points to 1. the cooperation and competition of producers of goods, and 2. the relations between those who produce and those who consume goods. Explaining the latter issue he wrote that “every nation be regulated by two different circumstances; first by the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which its labour is generally applied; and, secondly, by the proportion between the number of those who are employed in useful labour, and that of those who are not so employed. Whatever be the soil, climate, or extent of territory of any particular nation, the abundance or scantiness of its annual supply must, in that particular situation, depend upon those two circumstances.” Somewhat further he also mentions savage nations within which “every individual who is able to work, is more or less employed in useful labour, and endeavours to provide, as well as he can, the necessaries and conveniences of life, for himself, or such of his family or tribe as are either too old, or too young, or too infirm to go a hunting and fishing. Such nations, however, are so miserably poor, that from mere want, they are frequently reduced, or, at least, think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish with hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts. Among civilized and thriving nations, on the contrary, though a great number of people do not labour at all [...] yet the produce of the whole labour of the society is so great, that all are often abundantly supplied, and a workman, even of the lowest and poorest order, if he is frugal and industrious, may enjoy a greater share of the necessaries and conveniences of life than it is possible for any savage to acquire.” All

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Oxford 1998, p. 8 ff.

this indisputably entails a praise of the civilised society, or more precisely, such a society that has developed its productive capacities to such an extent that it is not only able to satisfy the living needs of the workers, but also of those who cannot work, for various reasons, and yet do still have needs of their own. In subsequent parts of *Inquiry...*, Smith attempts to demonstrate that the wealth of nations may be dependent upon rational behaviour on the part of both the former and the latter, although the principal force behind creating national wealth is constituted by the former.

Answering the question concerning the sources of rational behaviour, Smith claims that – at least in the early stages of societal development – they were not “originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.” While answering the question concerning the boundaries of social rationality, he points to the “extent of the market” (“When the market is very small, no person can have any encouragement to dedicate himself entirely to one employment”), which is in turn dependent on the extent of the social environment – it is larger in the cities than in the countryside, as well as on such conditions as the geographic location, roads and means of transport. Such ideas could – and often would – serve the British policy of the colonial expansion of the British Empire by the annexation of the territorial acquisitions of the East-India Company. It is worth noting, however, that the book not only contains the incitement to implement such policies, but also includes warnings against such forms of expansionism which may exceed the needs and capacities of the state.

### Enlightenment faith of the French

It seems beyond dispute that the leading figures of the French Enlightenment made a significant contribution to the decline of the distrust of human creative capacities and faith in divine omnipotent assistance among those in the West. It is equally obvious that they played different roles in tackling faith and building up the trust in man’s own creative capacities. Controversies arise, however, when one attempts to specify what those differences amount to. At this point, I shall not even make an attempt to resolve this issue. I will nevertheless focus on two leading representatives of the French Enlightenment, i.e., on Denis Diderot and Voltaire (actually François Marie

Arouet), and make an attempt to single out those elements of their beliefs that constitute proofs of their belief in human creative capacities.

The greatest achievement of Denis Diderot came in the editing and publication of the *Encyclopédie*, i.e., or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts, commonly known as the *Great French Encyclopaedia*. It is great not only due to its sheer volume (a full edition amounts to 30 tomes), but also due to the diversity and variety of issues tackled by the authors, as well as due to the very idea of the endeavour. As presented by Diderot in the *Preliminary Discourse* – it was supposed to contain a general picture of the endeavours of human reason across all nations and ages, and would present “a genealogical or encyclopaedic tree which will gather the various branches of knowledge together under a single point of view and will serve to indicate their origin and their relationships to one another.”<sup>19</sup>

It did obviously require a great deal of faith in human reason, as well as in the ability to recruit for the endeavour such great minds which would be free from any prejudice and willing to compliantly cooperate on such a bold enterprise. What is more, its implementation required the recruitment of such authors that would not be intimidated by Church censorship or ecclesiastic courts (whose operations Diderot got to know for himself after publishing the first volume in 1751), and that would not be faced down by the mockery on the part of those not believing in the possibility of success. The man constituting the *spiritus movens* was well aware of the various dangers and conditions. Therefore, he presented himself and his like-minded companions as “eclectics” as “the eclectic is a philosopher who, trampling underfoot prejudice, tradition, antiquity, general agreement, authority – in a word, everything that controls the minds of the common herd – dares to think for himself, returns to the clearest general principles, examines them, discusses them, admits nothing that is not based on the testimony of his experience and his reason; and from all the philosophies he has analysed without respect and bias he makes for himself a particular and domestic one which belongs to him.”

*Encyclopédie* was indeed an indisputably eclectic work. Its peculiar kind of eclecticism had its boundaries set by the Enlightenment naturalism (whose key demand was to get back to nature), as well as by the Enlightenment understanding of common sense, i.e., such an innate capacity for deciding arguments in question that allowed for no appeal to any higher authority. It did not

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Le Rond D’Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor 2009, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0001.083> [access: 10.01.2016].

prove to be strong enough, however, to forestall some lapses in craftsmanship and academic reliability on the part of the authors.<sup>20</sup> One thing at least seems to force him into no doubts, namely, the representation of man as a “Feeling, reflecting, thinking being, who freely walks the earth, who seems to be at the head of all other animals whom he dominates, who lives in society, who has invented the sciences and the arts, who has his particular goodness and badness, who has given himself masters, who has made laws for himself” (following the definition put forward by Diderot in the *Encyclopédie*).

Voltaire was among one of those contemporary philosophers who chose to keep their distance from the endeavour of publishing the *Great French Encyclopaedia*. This is attested by the fact that in spite of enticement by the editors, he failed to compose a single entry.<sup>21</sup> An important factor behind this decision must have been that he did not share in the passionate belief in the human creative powers characteristic of Diderot as well as his closest collaborators, such as for instance d’Alembert. He presented his own position, for instance, in *The Age of Louis XIV*.<sup>22</sup> This work contains historical considerations of the spirit of the people living in the most enlightened of all the centuries, as well as of the French, whom Voltaire believed to have surpassed all other nations in terms of Enlightenment. Such an enlightened state did not spare the nation, however, from religious tensions, which had caused its history to have been one of madmen ever since Calvin. The state of the national spirit in the 18th century appeared only a little better – this is demonstrated by his *Treatise on Tolerance*, or rather on the lack thereof; the main protagonist of this treatise – the protestant Jean Calas – is falsely accused and put to death by Catholic judges (in the light of this treatise his main fault came not in his supposed crime but was rather fostered by his religious convictions).<sup>23</sup> The state of the spirit of the other Christian nations seemed no better. For instance, when it came to the Portuguese, Voltaire refers

<sup>20</sup> Paul Hazard reminds us that “from the very start, its enemies reproached it with borrowing wholesale, and with borrowing without acknowledgement from previous compilations, periodicals and books.” It was pointed out that it allowed for many mistakes to slip-in, including a few stupidities, and while its contributors included some geniuses the ranks were also filled by nameless labourers, who provided what they could – all this led to multiple discrepancies in the quality and doctrine represented by articles. Cf. P. Hazard, *European Thought...*, p. 211.

<sup>21</sup> His participation was limited to giving a final editorial shape to an entry written by d’Alembert: *Geneva* – in its light the inhabitants of this city are essentially proponents not of theism but of enlightenment deism, which did naturally outrage the referents of this statement.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Paris 1908.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance*, Cambridge 2000.

in his philosophical novella *Candide: or Optimism* to the dramatic events of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, which left some of the citizens buried under the rubble while those who kept their lives “defying death in the pursuit of plunder, rushed into the midst of the ruin, where he found some money, with which he got drunk, and, after he had slept himself sober he purchased the favours of the first good-natured wench that came in his way, amidst the ruins of demolished houses and the groans of half-buried and expiring persons.”<sup>24</sup>

The optimism featuring in the title of the philosophical novella essentially constitutes Voltaire's sarcastic jibe at the Christian thesis that we are living in the best of all possible worlds. Its plot features events in the life of Candide and his friends, which leads rather to a conclusion that this world is full of all kinds of crime, injustice, basic human spite and such insanity that no reason can counteract. While the fact that the main hero was provided by nature with a reasonably sound judgement and rudimentary wit such that may constitute a foundation substantial enough so as not to lose all faith in human capacity to cope with this world, it does not seem sufficient, however, to foresee and let alone prevent all the calamities. What is more, life in this world constantly puts to trial our faith in the point of living and cooperating with others and of following the guidance of those who would be expected to show us the right ways of thinking and acting. One of such persons in the story is the master of philosophy, doctor Pangloss. What he in fact proves to be is not a master of good advice, or a master at finding one's own path in life, so much as a master of seeking and finding positive aspects of even the most shameful and dramatic life events. He was in fact himself afflicted by a malady not without reason known as the “French disease.”<sup>25</sup>

At some point, another master of explanation and consolation appears on Candide's path – the old and poor scholar Martin.<sup>26</sup> It is all for the best

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*, in *The Works of Voltaire: a Contemporary Version (vol. 1)*, Paris 1901, p. 13 ff.

<sup>25</sup> It resulted from the fact that Pangloss was looking for the sweetness of paradise in the arms of Pacuette, the maid of the baroness. “Pacuette received this present of a learned Cordelier, who derived it from the fountain head; he was indebted for it to an old countess, who had it of a captain of horse, who had it of a marchioness, who had it of a page, the page had it of a Jesuit, who, during his novitiate, had it in a direct line from one of the fellow-adventurers of Christopher Columbus [...] ‘O sage Pangloss’ cried Candide, ‘what a strange genealogy is this! Is not the devil the root of it?’, ‘Not at all,’ replied the great man, ‘it was a thing unavoidable, a necessary ingredient in the best of worlds.’” Cf. Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*, in *The Works of Voltaire: a Contemporary Version (vol. 1)*, Paris 1901, pp. 71-74.

<sup>26</sup> “This scholar, who was in fact a very honest man, had been robbed by his wife, beaten by his son, and forsaken by his daughter, who had run away with a Portuguese. He

that Candide stumbles upon Martin, as he enjoys philosophising on various themes. This old and poor scholar proves clearly gifted at finding the glimmer sides of people, events and phenomena, which may at first glance prove better than in reality – such as for instance as the fact that the French were provided by fate with “all contradictions, all possible incompatibilities – you will find them in the government, in the law-courts, in the churches, in the public shows of this droll nation,” or the fact that the Polish twice were given a king whom they dethroned – although “Providence has given me another country, where I have done more good than all the Sarmatian kings were ever capable of doing on the banks of the Vistula.”<sup>27</sup>

The ending of the novella does feature some optimistic elements – regardless of the fact whether they seem in line with the “logic” of any of its main protagonists. After all, one must make one’s life in this imperfect world without necessarily refusing some basic pleasures – such as having occasional disputes “about morals and metaphysics,” chiding the clergy or tending one’s small farm – not large enough to cause much toil, but not as small as to cause boredom or fail to provide for life’s expenses (“our labour preserves us from three great evils – weariness, vice, and want”). Such an optimistic accent comes also in the fact that Candid does after all his life experiences get to the wisdom which can be expressed by the conviction that one should tend to one’s own “small farm.” This may of course be understood literarily, but it can also be construed as a philosophical desideratum that one should care more about the small rather than the great things of this world, in which one has to live and cooperate with others.

### Some general remarks

The first of my remarks concerns the participation of philosophers and philosophy in the Enlightenment cultural breakthrough. If one were to follow the reasoning of such of its critics as MacIntyre or Taylor, one would have to judge it as not only important, but in fact decisive with respect to its character and scale. This had already been doubted by some of the well-

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had been likewise deprived of a small employment on which he subsisted...” See *ibidem*, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> This probably refers to Stanisław Leszczyński, who was elected the Polish King in 1705 as well as 1733, and having abdicated, left for France, where he became the ruler of Lothringia, where he became known as a good manager and supporter of the sciences and arts.

known proponents of this breakthrough, such as Voltaire, who put a big question-mark over the qualifications of the philosophers – at least those who were supposed to be great sources of authority for the youth. Even though Voltaire did in fact emulate (and successfully create) a new type of philosopher (characterised by a lack of in-depth academic training and extending one's own qualifications through self-education), yet, he does not seem to have the credentials to present himself as a scientific authority. He could nevertheless exert influence over his audience by way of written and printed word, which is nowadays also disseminated through various kinds of Internet fora. Even though Max Weber spoke in disparaging terms of the creative capacities of the literary-philosophers of the Enlightenment era (claiming for instance that “the need of literary, academic, or café society intellectuals to include “religious” feelings in the inventory of their sources of impressions and sensations, and among their topics for discussion, has never yet given rise to a new religion”), yet, subsequent events and contemporary cultural reality do not prove the accuracy of this evaluation.<sup>28</sup> Even disregarding the fact that professional academic philosophers have been put on the defensive (having been pushed out from their positions of social authority by the so-called media), one should point to the fact that many of them have become similar in what they communicate and how they do it to the way of messaging originated by such philosophers-publicists as Diderot or Voltaire.

My second remark concerns the rationality assumed and utilised by the chief creators of that era. There were clear differences in terms of how they conceptualised and put it to use. This has been pointed out by MacIntyre and Taylor<sup>29</sup> in their analyses of the period. One might acquiesce to their

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. Weber, *Economy and Society...*, p. 517.

<sup>29</sup> According to Ch. Taylor, those following J. Locke created and used instrumental reason and reasonability, while MacIntyre points not only to the arrival of different types of reason and reasonability in the period of the Enlightenment, but also to the existence of irreconcilable differences between them. “How did it come to be the case? The answer falls into two parts, each having to do with the Enlightenment and with its subsequent history. It was a central aspiration of the Enlightenment, an aspiration the formulation of which was itself a great achievement, to provide for debate in the public realm standards and methods of rational justification by which alternative courses of action in every sphere of life could be adjudged just or unjust, rational or irrational, enlightened or unenlightened. So, it was hoped, reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places [...] Yet both the thinkers of the Enlighten-

opinion that it was the Enlightenment period that gave voice to functionalism, instrumentalism, utilitarianism and pragmatism in the conception of reason and reasonability. What remains disputable is the evaluation of their capacity and utility for solving the problems of human life. Quite clearly, those capacities were held in higher regard by Diderot than Voltaire, while Smith was inclined to give it relatively high marks, but only when we would put our bets not on individual reason and reasonability, but on such collective properties as those of a particular nation. Furthermore, in Smith's case there are a number of additional conditions necessary for such rationality to be created and maintained – such as, for instance, its connectedness with proper “moral sentiments” (that Smith wrote about in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*), or the capacity to calculate and predict the consequences of actions undertaken as well as of opinions professed. This last question constituted one of the main differences between the enlightened Englishmen and Scots, on the one hand, and the enlightened French on the other. Even up to this day, the so-called Voltairianism is associated with professing excessively bold opinions, whose foundations are more emotional than rational, and for which it often proves difficult to find strong justification.

The third and last among the remarks that may be made concerns the foundations underlying the construction of faith in human creative capacities. I am in no doubt that the enlightenment thinkers not only forced a deep reevaluation of the traditional conception of those foundations (such as the Holy Scripture, or the authority of the Church Fathers), but also proposed their own foundations to take the place of the old. The differences between the former and latter kinds of foundations are of a fundamental nature. In the first case, what was understood by “foundations” was something so still and solid that it would be independent of the changing conditions of time and space. In the second case, however, the foundations were only expected to provide men with the capacity to exert rational control over those conditions so as to gain possibly the greatest gains for themselves. With the passage of time, the conviction became increasingly louder that this expectation cannot go too far, as neither the control, nor the gains, are common enough for us to be able to claim that they serve all men. It goes without saying that the loss of universals in culture was not an easy one to fathom. Therefore, we

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ment and their successors proved unable to agree as to what precisely those principles were which would be undeniable by all rational persons. One kind of answer was given by the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, a second by Rousseau, a third by Bentham, a fourth by Kant, a fifth by Scottish philosophers of common sense and their French and American disciples” Cf. A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame 1988, p. 6 ff.

still continue the unqualified use of such key-words as “truth,” “justice” or “human rights” – even though each of them may mean a different thing for different people and function differently in diverse social and cultural contexts.

