

The Enlightenment and Religion

Religion and Society: Winter 2010

I. What Was the Enlightenment?

II. Aspects of The Enlightenment

III. The Enlightenment and Deism

The Enlightenment: ca. 1750-1800

A. Some Central Figures

France

Montesquieu (1689-1755)
Voltaire (1694-1778)
Rousseau (1712-1778)
Diderot (1713-1784)
Helvetius (1715-1771)
Sade (1740-1814)
Condorcet (1743-1794)

Britain

Hutcheson (1694-1746)
Reid (1710-1796)
Hume (1711-1776)
Smith (1723-1790)
Bentham (1748-1832)
Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

Continent

Mandeville (1670-1733)
Linnaeus (1707-1788)
Kant (1724-1804)
D'Holbach (1723-1789)
Beccaria (1738-1794)

American

Franklin (1706-1790)
Paine (1737-1806)
Jefferson (1743-1826)
Madison (1751-1836)

B. General Themes

- Opposed the authority of tradition
- Favored the faculty of reason
- Science as source of knowledge
- Continuity of natural and social sciences
- No central doctrine or system
- Belief in progress

The Spirit of the Enlightenment

“ ‘Have courage to use your own reason!’ – that is the motto of enlightenment. Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind ... remains under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so easy not to be of age. If I have a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, and so forth, I need not trouble myself. I need not think, if I can only pay. ...”

— Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?”

II. Aspects of the Enlightenment

A. Science: Order and Mechanism

Order:

There is an order to the world that we can discover and classify.

Linnaeus: *Systema Naturae* (1735-1758)

Diderot et al.: *Encyclopédie* (begun 1751)

Mechanism:

The operations of everything in the world are through mechanical cause and effect, and we can discover the principles of these operations through scientific investigation.

Laplace: *Celestial Mechanics* (1799-1805)

B. Religion: Higher Biblical Criticism

- Bible as authored by human beings
- Emphasizes comparing scriptural texts to each other and to other ancient texts
- Comparison of scriptures to historical events
- This kind of analysis was used to support conclusions about periods of authorship, and of differences in authors
- Precursor of “Wellhausen Hypothesis” of the Pentateuch (J, E, D, P sources)

C. Ethics, Law and Politics

- Rejection of traditional authorities to support ethical or political precepts
- What came in their place?

Social Contract theory

(Locke, Rousseau; cf. Declaration of Independence)

Social order is based upon a prehistoric, reasonable agreement, and is sustained by ongoing agreement

Kantian Categorical Imperative

(Kant, obviously!)

Ethics is based upon the fact that human beings are practical rational beings.

Utilitarianism

(Hume, Bentham, Smith)

What is right is what will bring about the greatest happiness for all concerned.

III. Natural Religion: Deism

(Paley, Priestley, Paine; cf. Hume)

Central Features:

- *There is an all-powerful, benign God.*
- *We can come to be justified in belief in God through investigation of the world and exercise of reason.*
- *The Creation is sufficient evidence for God's existence and benign nature.*
- *Revelation, scripture, and religious traditions provide no basis for belief.*
- *The God in which we are justified in believing is not God as is represented in any scripture – not the Jewish Bible, not the Christian Bible, and not the Qu'ran.*

A Version of the Teleological Argument:

1. Human-made artifacts exhibit complexity and coordination of their parts. (Prem)
- ∴ 2. The reason why artifacts exhibit complexity and coordination of parts is that they are the products of intelligent design and are intended to serve certain purposes. (1,IBE)
3. Naturally occurring beings (e.g., living things) as well as the world as a whole exhibit complexity and coordination of their parts, to a far greater degree than human-made artifacts. (Prem)
- ∴ 4. The reason why naturally occurring beings as well as the whole world exhibit complexity and coordination of parts is that they are the products of intelligent design and are intended to serve certain purposes. (3,IBE)
- ∴ 5. The world and all beings within it have an intelligent designer of far greater power and intelligence than human beings. (4)
- ∴ 6. God, an infinitely powerful and intelligent being, exists. (5)

Note: “IBE” stands for “Inference to the Best Explanation.”

Compare Paine:

Chapter IX, p. 46: “Do we want...”

Chapter XI, p. 55: “Of what use is it...”

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