

# **IDEALS of the ENLIGHTENMENT**

## **For TODAY**

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The subject matter of this paper is to see whether the ideals of Enlightenment can any longer serve as our guide today. To find out the answer one has to identify these ideals. In a nutshell, one could say that they rotate around one principle, that is, the sovereignty of human reason. And this sovereignty has been tackled and clarified by Kant in his essay entitled "An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?" which was published in a Berlin monthly in 1784. In this essay Kant defines Enlightenment as "man's quitting the nonage accompanied by himself. Nonage is the inability of making use of one's own reason without the guidance of another. This nonage is occasioned by one's self, when the cause of it is not from want of understanding but of resolution and courage to use one's own reason without the guidance of another. Have courage to make use of thy own reason is therefore the dictum of Enlightenment.

In this sense human reason is autonomous. Being autonomous means being critical. And that is why the Enlightenment's definition of philosophy is that it is the organized habit of criticism, and this definition does not correspond to the traditional definition<sup>(1)</sup>

By identifying philosophy with criticism the Enlightenment raised serious doubts about the validity of metaphysics, or strictly speaking, about the validity of the absolute. And that is why it was by chance that Kant was the first to introduce the concept of the absolute into the field of philosophy at the beginning of his preface to the first edition of the "Critique of Pure Reason". He says that reason has this peculiar destiny, within a part of its knowledge, of being forced to face questions which it cannot avoid. These questions are imposed on reason by its very nature, but it is unable to give answers. These unanswerable questions are about the concept of the absolute, whether you call it God or State. And the history of philosophy, according to Kant, is nothing but the story of this inability, However, Kant differentiates between two cases: to seek to grapple the absolute and to grapple the absolute. There has always existed in the world and there will always continue to exist as a possibility for grappling the absolute, but to conceive that you grasped the absolute in an absolute way, is an illusion. For in so far as one grasps the absolute he

relativizes it, and then it is no longer the all-comprehending reality. And that is why Protagoras' dictum is still acceptable: Man is the measure of the absolute. And this statement could be considered as the dictum of Enlightenment. One of the sequels of this dictum is the relativity of knowledge, but not relativism. For relativism denies the dialectical movement of the relativization of the absolute, whereas the relative points beyond itself to the unconditional. And this dialectical movement, in its turn, prevents us from falling into absolutism or dogmatism which seeks to impose one's view of truth by the use of arbitrary power. Thus, if each social system adopts one view of truth conceived as absolute, then we will have more than one absolute and this contradicts the nature of the absolute that cannot be but one. And that is why the absolutes cannot live in a peaceful coexistence, otherwise they lack being absolute. Using the Darwinian terminology, the absolutes, in this case, struggle for existence and the survival is for the fittest. But this struggle is performed by the relative in the name of the absolute. Thus, man adopting an absolute, struggles for it to the extent that he raises war against those who believe in another absolute. And this is\* what I call "theological murder".<sup>(2)</sup> For this reason Enlightenment could be considered as one of the greatest revolutions of human history educating people how to uproot this theological murder. But this education is not an easy task.

Enlightenment was severely criticized philosophically and religiously. Philosophically, it was criticized by the Frankfurt School especially by Adorno and Horkheimer in their book "Dialectic of Enlightenment" and by Horkheimer in his book "End of Reason". In the first book, the co-authors try to explain how, at the same height of the development of democratic European culture, fascism could become dominant. Their explanation is that the spirit of Enlightenment which is responsible for the social, intellectual and material progress has always within it the seeds of regression to primitive unenlightened forms. There is a dialectic of Enlightenment by which Enlightenment reverses itself and turns into a new barbarism, that is, fascism. Consequently, reason becomes unreason.<sup>(3)</sup>

In the second book Horkheimer remarks that the bourgeois philosophy as it is the incarnation of Enlightenment is, by its very essence, rationalist. But rationalism has turned against itself and fallen into either skepticism or dogmatism. Nothing remained from the concept of reason. Moreover, reason is the means by which the individual is rooted in society or is adapted in a way that pushes reason to master the instincts and sentiments.<sup>(4)</sup> And that is why Kant says that "apathy is a necessary presupposition of virtue."<sup>(5)</sup> In this

sense Horkheimer says that reason becomes a calculator delivering analytic judgments and discarding value judgments. But if we consider the invention of calculators and computers as the outcome of the scientific and technological revolution which is an outcome of Enlightenment, then Frankfurt School has to oppose this revolution.

Religiously, Enlightenment was criticized indirectly by fundamentalists through the concept of modernism which is an outcome of the concept of Enlightenment. Historically speaking, fundamentalism dates back to the turn of this century. The name comes from a series of booklets called the "Fundamentals" issued from 1910 to 1915 criticizing the attempt of christian adjustment to modernism, that is, science, evolution, liberalism and adhering to modernism, that is, science evolution, liberalism and adhering to the literal inherence of scripture.

Thus, Fundamentalism could be defined as an anti-modern ideology opposing enlightened capitalism that disrupted the religious Weltanschauung. In this sense, Fundamentalism differs from conservatism, Conservatism accepts the modern reduction of the role of religion and accepts the modern world as the arena in which theological task is to be done, whereas Fundamentalism refuses the modern logos. And that is why its pivotal idea is not to translate religion into the mental categories of modernism but to change the modern mental categories so that religion can be grasped. Anyhow, the fundamentalist movement became an international phenomenon. But I'll limit my paper to two fundamentalist movements, that is, the Christian and the Islamic.

As for Christian Fundamentalism, it was incarnated in 1979 in the "Moral Majority" founded by Jerry Falwell with the purpose of liberating USA from armament control and establishing a military defense network and the expansion of anti-communist propaganda. To reinforce those objectives Falwell founded a coalition of his followers, the Catholics, the Jews and the Mormons with the aim of "launching the theological guns at liberalism, humanism and secularism, in Falwell's own words.<sup>(6)</sup>

Christian Fundamentalism is paralleled by Islamic Fundamentalism represented by the Islamic groups headed by Al Mawdoudi (Pakistan), Sayed Qutb (Egypt) and Khomeini (Iran). All three consider the capitalist West and the communist East as the two camps of ignorance that should be discarded by Islamic fundamentalism for God's honour and strengthens the Arabs with Islam, but if they look for honour and strength in other places they become contemptible.<sup>(7)</sup> But what is meant by the word "ignorance"? In Qutb's words, it is

the renaissance, religious reformation and enlightenment, and it is the duty of militant Muslims to eliminate these phenomena, but on one condition that they should be eliminated by religious wars and not by peaceful means. This condition was elaborated by the theoretician of the Iranian revolution Ali Shariati in his book entitled "Sociology of Islam" tries to interpret history in religious terms. He says that the story of Abel and Cain is the beginning of a war that is still and not concluded. The weapon of Abel has been religion and the weapon of Cain has also been religion. It is for this reason that the war of religion against religion has also been constant of human history. On the one hand is the religion of "Shirk", that is, of assigning partners to God, a religion that furnishes the justification of Shirk in society and class discrimination. On the other hand, is the religion of "Tawheed", of the oneness of God, which furnishes the justification of the unity of all classes and races.<sup>(8)</sup> Owing to this inevitable war between the Shirk and the Tawheed, Shariati states that the most important fundamental Islamic principle is the ability to offer oneself as a testimony. It is the principle that pushes the Muslim into war without hesitation. In this respect, it is not death that chooses the martyr, but it is the martyr who chooses death consciously and according to his own will. It is not a martyr of tragedy but of an ideal because testimony by blood is the supreme degree of perfection. This means that the real Moslem is the militant martyr.

And now the most crucial issue is the following: assuming there is an organic relation between religion and economics all over human history, the crucial issue is to find out the kind of social class that can fit into the religious fundamentalism. To tackle this issue in a scientific way one has to find out the kind of relation between fundamentalism and human civilization as long as the fundamentalists pretend that their mission is to save human civilization. It is well noticed that fundamentalism is against liberalism and Marxism. But these two trends are the outcome of Enlightenment. Engles says, "Modern socialism, originally, appears ostensibly, as a more logical extension of the principles laid down by the great French philosophers of the eighteenth century". He goes on to say that the great men who, in France, prepared men's minds for the coming revolutionaries, recognized no external authority of any kind; everything was subjected to the most|unsparing criticism, everything must justify its existence before the judgment-seat of reason or give up existence. Reason became the sole measure of everything.<sup>(9)</sup>

But what does Engles mean by "logical extension"? The answer could be given by Engles' theory of the dialectics between the absolute and relative truth. He says that the contradiction between the character of human thought necessarily conceived as absolute and

its reality in individual human beings, all of whom think only limitedly, is a condition which can be resolved only in the course of infinite progress. In this sense, human thought is just as much sovereign as not sovereign, and its capacity for knowledge just as much unlimited as limited. It is sovereign and unlimited in its disposition, its vocation, its possibilities and its historical ultimate goal. It is not sovereign and it is limited in its individual realization. <sup>(10)</sup>

Further on, Lenin elaborated this dialectics in "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" under the title "Absolute and relative Truth" in which he claims that the distinction between relative and absolute truth is sufficiently indefinite to prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the word, from becoming something dead, frozen and ossified, but it is, at the same time, sufficiently definite to enable us to dissociate ourselves from fideism and agnosticism. <sup>(11)</sup>

In this respect, fundamentalism is against both liberalism and Marxism because it rejects the Enlightenment and modernity as its outcome. And since modernity is equivalent to the scientific and technological revolution which is the spirit of the twentieth century then fundamentalism could be considered as an entropy to the process of human civilization. In this respect, one has to find out a social class that could cope with this civilizational entropy. It could not be the enlightened capitalism, but an unenlightened capitalism, that is, what I call "parasitic capitalism" that grows rich without development neither in agriculture nor in industry. Consequently, this new kind of capitalism negates production in all fields of human activity and instead adopts parasitic activities such as, drug traffic, creating black market and trading in illegal activities. In this respect, parasitic capitalism shares fundamentalism in standing against the real process of human civilization which is production in the broadest sense, that is, civilizational production and not only economic production.

To conclude, I think it is clear that the ideals of the Enlightenment should be assimilated, not in a passive way, but in a way that could pave the way for the real process of human civilization.

#### Notes:

(1) Peter Gray, *The Enlightenment*, New York, Norton & Company 1977, p. 130.

- (2) Mourad Wahba (edit), *Roots of Dogmatism*, Cairo, Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, p.234.
- (3) Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London, Verso, 1979, p. 90.
- (4) Horkheimer, *End of Reason*, quoted from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 95.
- (5) *Ibid.*
- (6) J. Falwell, *Listen America*, New York, Doubleday, 1980, pp. 16-81.
- (7) Abd alslam Yasin, *Call to God in al Jamaa*, 1975.
- (8) Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, pp. 27-28.
- (9) *Ibid.*
- (10) *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- (11) Lenin, *Marxism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 134.