

Kant's Machiavellian Moment

El momento maquiaveliano de Kant

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Abstract

At least two recent collections of essays – *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment* (2001) and *What's Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question* (2001) – have responded to postmodern critiques of Enlightenment by arguing that Enlightenment *philosophes* themselves embraced a number of post-modern themes. This essay situates Kant's essay *Was ist Aufklärung* (1784) in the context of this recent literature about the appropriate characterization of modernity and the Enlightenment. Adopting an internalist reading of Kant's *Aufklärung* essay, this paper observes that Kant is surprisingly ambivalent about who might be Enlightened and unspecific about when Enlightenment might be achieved. The paper argues that this is because Kant is concerned less with elucidating his concept of Enlightenment and more with characterizing a political condition that might provide the conditions for the possibility of Enlightenment. This paper calls this political condition *modernity* and it is achieved when civil order can be maintained alongside fractious and possibly insoluble public disagreement about matters of conscience, including the nature and possibility of Enlightenment. Thus, the audience for the *Aufklärung* essay is not the tax collector, soldier or clergyman, but rather the sovereign. Kant enjoins and advises the prince that discord and debate about matters of conscience need not entail any political unrest or upheaval. It is in this restricted (Pocockian) sense that the Enlightenment essay is Kant's Machiavellian moment.

Key words

Kant; Enlightenment; *Aufklärung*; post-modernism; modernism; modernity; Machiavelli; Pocock; Foucault; Lyotard

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Resumen

Al menos dos recientes colecciones de ensayos, *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment* (2001) y *What's Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question* (2001), han respondido a las críticas posmodernas de la Ilustración aduciendo que los *philosophes* de la Ilustración abrazaron una serie de temas posmodernos. Este artículo sitúa el ensayo de Kant, *¿Qué es la Ilustración?* (1784) en el contexto de esta reciente literatura acerca de la caracterización apropiada de la Modernidad y la Ilustración. Adoptando una lectura inmanente del ensayo de Kant sobre la *Aufklärung*, señalo que Kant es sorprendentemente ambivalente con respecto a quién podría ser ilustrado y no especifica cuándo podrá alcanzarse la Ilustración. Este artículo argumenta que esto se debe a que Kant está menos preocupado por elucidar este concepto de Ilustración que por caracterizar una condición política que podría suministrar las condiciones para posibilitar la Ilustración. Así, pues, la audiencia del ensayo sobre la *Aufklärung* no es el recaudador de impuestos, el soldado o el sacerdote, sino más bien el soberano. Kant ordena y aconseja al príncipe que la discordia y el debate sobre cuestiones de conciencia no comportan necesariamente inseguridad o conmoción social alguna. Es en este sentido (Pocockiano) restringido que el ensayo sobre la Ilustración actúa como el momento maquiaveliano de Kant.

Palabras clave

Kant; Ilustración; *Aufklärung*; Posmodernidad; Modernismo; Modernidad; Machiavelli; Pocock; Foucault; Lyotard

1. Enlightenment and Critique

Everyone, it seems, should want to be enlightened. Perhaps that's just because the alternative – being unenlightened – seems so ignominious. Shall you be daring and engage in the autonomous use of reason? Or, shall you be cowardly and dwell in nonage and tutelage? Put in just these terms *Was is Aufklärung?* seems to be a loaded question. We'll take Enlightenment, of course. There isn't much choice in the matter.

Even Enlightenment's detractors – among them Hamann, Herder, Heidegger and Adorno and Horkheimer – acknowledge that we always choose Enlightenment. As Enlightenment's critics, their concern is to anticipate, redirect or diagnose enlightenment and its consequences. Whatever the specifics of their criticism, as critics they must minimally take some position on what *Aufklärung* might or might not be, and perhaps also some stance on its attainability. And, in turn, taking, holding, asserting and defending a stance on Enlightenment can be (and has been) interpreted as itself being an enlightenment commitment. That is, the willingness and capability to engage in processes of giving and accepting reasons for some position or another is, if not a key tenet of enlightened, well down the path toward Enlightenment. Grappling with the question *Was is Aufklärung?*, would then imply not only a disposition towards Enlightenment but also an enlightened disposition.

From this vantage point, Enlightenment seems as ineluctable as Descartes' *cogito*. Positing the *cogito* implies a thinking thing that does the positing, and so doubting that there are thinking things leads to self-contradiction. Likewise, if the willingness to engage in critical discussion of Enlightenment is always already evidence of an enlightened critical disposition, then Enlightenment cannot be rejected on pain of self-contradiction. To what extent may Enlightenment values, procedures or aims themselves be subject to question by Enlightenment precepts? To express the same question in loosely Nietzschean terms: is a complete transvaluation of all values possible, or does such a transvaluation itself depend on some enduring underlying values? Considered from this vantage point, the question *Was is Aufklärung?* need not be about Enlightenment *per se*, but is instead much more a question about the limits of analytical reflexivity.

A recent example of this form of argument is Jürgen Habermas' famous question posed to Michel Foucault. "How can Foucault's self-understanding as a thinker in the tradition of Enlightenment be compatible with his unmistakable critique of precisely this form of knowledge, which is that of modernity?" Foucault had just died so he could not answer the question. Yet Habermas kept alive the reply that Foucault was embroiled in a hopeless contradiction, albeit a "productive contradiction" and an "instructive contradiction."¹ An accusation of contradiction is attention grabbing – as Habermas' continues to be. Anything, true or false, can follow from a contradiction, so it is a potentially devastating objection to an argument. But, usually it's quite hard to make such an accusation stick. The easy cure for a contradiction is a distinction. If it really is the case that attempting to put together a reasonable, well-argued and (therefore) convincing critique of Enlightenment immediately implicates you in some tragic, misguided contradiction, then something seems to be very much awry in our intellectual machinery. We should be leery of arguments that suggest otherwise. Surely I can have my Enlightenment and eat it too.

The question is not whether a distinction can be made but where to make the distinction. As Richard Bernstein points out there are many ways to save Foucault and others from accusations of self-contradiction.² Enlightenment is a philosophical and historiographical concept that is both elastic and piecemeal. Elastic in the sense that the scope of the concept shifts over time, and piecemeal in the sense that the relevant histories that constitute it continue to shift over the course of inquiry. And so decisions, cuts, must be made. The cut this paper makes, or begins to make, is between modernity and Enlightenment. Modernity, I suggest, is a political condition that opens a possibility for the pursuit of enlightenment; it is not the process or product of Enlightenment itself. (Thus, contra Habermas, Foucault could work within the Enlightenment tradition and offer

¹See Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's What is Enlightenment?" in S.W. Nicholson, ed. and trans., *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians Debate* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 173-179 at 176 and 178.

²See Richard J. Bernstein, "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophical Ethos" in Michael Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 283-314.

a critique of modernity without any risk of contradiction.) I argue here that modernity is a political condition which is achieved when there can be civil order alongside fractious and possibly insoluble public disagreement about matters of conscience.

By contrast, enlightenment is a different creature. Enlightenment may be (and has been) variously formulated. Sometimes Enlightenment is portrayed as an ongoing process, as Adorno and Horkheimer famously suggested in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). At other times, Enlightenment is presented as a past achievement or future goal, and sometimes even both. For instance, in the Preface to *The Philosophy of Enlightenment* (1932), Ernst Cassirer reflected, “the time is again ripe for applying ... self-criticism to the present age, for holding up to it that bright clear mirror fashioned by the Enlightenment.” Cassirer wrote this at the Warburg Institute in Hamburg as the Nazi Party machinated to achieve power. He went on to suggest that Enlightenment might be regained: “the age which venerated reason and science as man’s highest faculty cannot and must not be lost even for us.”³ As a product or outcome, Enlightenment may represent some achieved consensus — some universal agreement — about the character of the good, the true or the beautiful. So, for example, for a stereotypical (and inexistent) eighteenth-century *philosophe* the enlightened consensus was that the rational is the good, the good is the natural, and the natural is the rational. That is, of course, circular but, even today, many take the circle to be virtuous rather than vicious. The very ability to debate these and other conceptions of enlightenment, without any threat to civic order marks the achievement of modernity.

This distinction between modernity and enlightenment was articulated, I suggest, in Immanuel Kant’s *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (1784). The final section of this paper argues that the *Aufklärung* essay was Kant’s “Machiavellian moment” in which he argues for the indifference of princes to the free and public use of reason in matters of conscience. In so doing, I shall suggest, Kant simultaneously makes an implicit distinction between modernity and enlightenment. Of course, some Kant scholars read the *Aufklärung* piece as anticipating positions articulated in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) and his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798).⁴ In the second section of this essay, I point to several ambivalences in Kant’s *Aufklärung* essay. I think these are unexpected if Kant was simply articulating positions developed in greater detail elsewhere. I take these ambivalences to be part of Kant’s rhetorical strategy, signaling that the essay is offering a distinct argument. Of course, the very attempt to distinguish enlightenment and modernity may seem misguided, and perhaps even counter-intuitive. Are not the terms synonymous? And so, I shall begin by suggesting that this synonymy is only a feature of a very recent intellectual history.

³See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon Press), xi.

⁴For example, see Henry E. Allison, *Essays on Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 229-235.

2. A Postmodern Enlightenment?

In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984), Jean-François Lyotard offered the best known definition of the postmodern as “incredulity towards metanarratives.” That’s probably as good a simple definition of postmodernism as one can hope for. Lyotard himself rejected two specific metanarratives as unsustainable myths: the myth of the progress of knowledge and the myth of the progress of liberation. Other avowed postmodernists called for the rejection of various other metanarratives — the myth of objectivity, the myth of the public sphere, the myth of universal reason — the list goes on. For his part, Lyotard was largely indifferent to the ultimate origin of such myths. The proclivity for metanarrative is, “noticeable in Renaissance Humanism and variously present in the Enlightenment, the *Sturm und Drang*, German idealist philosophy and the historical school in France.”⁵ Many other postmodernists, however, identified the eighteenth-century Enlightenment — mainly as it occurred in France, Scotland and Germany — as the primary source of the many dubious metanarratives that informed and guided subsequent modernity. If indeed the fact or concept of modernity was prototyped by Enlightenment *philosophes*, then the historical Enlightenment is always implicated in debates about modernism. To be postmodern is to be post-Enlightenment, and in some extreme cases, even anti-Enlightenment.

In 2001, two collections of philosophical and historical essays were published that assessed some of the claims made by postmodernists about the Enlightenment. Daniel Gordon edited *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment*, while Keith Baker and Peter Reill edited *What’s Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question*. Both volumes were clearly in the same key, but they also opened on precisely the same note. Baker and Reill wrote: “the many varieties of thinking grouped under the rubric of ‘postmodernism’ share at least one salient character: they all depend on a stereotyped, even caricatural, account of the Enlightenment.”⁶ Gordon meanwhile cautioned against “postmodernist academics whose knowledge of the Enlightenment is limited to a series of derogatory clichés: the Enlightenment glorified ‘instrumental’ reason; the Enlightenment set out to eliminate cultural diversity; the Enlightenment naively idealized history as infinite progress.”⁷ Interestingly, perhaps in the spirit of settling conflict, neither book attempts to reject or refute postmodernism. Instead, the various essays in both volumes contribute to a slightly new and different project: reconstructing Enlightenment so that in most relevant respects it is continuous with postmodernism.

⁵ See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 30.

⁶ See Keith M. Baker and Peter H. Reill, *What’s Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1.

⁷ See Daniel Gordon, ed. *Postmodernism and Enlightenment: New Perspectives in Eighteenth-Century French Intellectual History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1.

As might be expected, the “postmodern Enlightenment” makes no mention of universality, reason, nature, essentialism or secularism. It is, instead, envisioned as an ongoing conversation of humanity about potential solutions to two very general concerns, one epistemological and the other political. The epistemological concern is about the well-foundedness of knowledge claims. The political concern is about the means to build an inclusive politics of diversity and difference amongst classes, cultures and genders. Richard Rorty speaks for this well-tempered Enlightenment when he argues for the continuity of Enlightenment and postmodernism by claiming that, “there were two Enlightenment projects,” one political and the other philosophical. The political project was “to create heaven on earth” while the philosophical project was, “to find a new comprehensive, world-view which would replace God with Nature and Reason.”⁸ Rorty then maintained that the political Enlightenment project continues, while postmodernism has shown that the epistemological project of philosophy has failed. An inclusive politics may still be possible, but there is no salve for epistemological anxiety.

This new-fangled postmodern Enlightenment might well be regarded with suspicion, perhaps with good cause but not for the reason that the Enlightenment did not express postmodern themes. Historically speaking, it's just good sense to remind ourselves that eighteenth-century *literati* argued for a variety of philosophical positions and agitated for a number of different objectives. The Enlightenment was an intellectually, geographically, culturally and temporally dispersed movement. This point had been raised two decades before a “postmodern Enlightenment” had even been suggested, by Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich in the collection of essays *The Enlightenment in National Context* (1981). Teich concluded that volume by noting that the *Aufklärungs* were “socially a heterogeneous group” drawn from “aristocratic-bourgeois” classes.⁹ Enlightenment interlocutors were certainly not a representative sample of eighteenth-century humanity, but nevertheless, Enlightenment was variously expressed by different genders and classes and cultures. Given this diversity of Enlightenments, it would be surprising if at least some postmodern concerns hadn't been voiced.

The reason, then, to be cautious interpreting the Enlightenment as presaging postmodernity is that taking this stance might capitulate far too much to the particular strand of recent French philosophy articulated by Foucault and Lyotard, among others. Consider for a moment an alternative, now largely forgotten, historiography of modernism that does not identify either modernity or postmodernity with Enlightenment. This other history was articulated by a generation of Anglo-American intellectual historians who produced a bevy of books in the 1980s. These books pointed out that there was a sustained critique of established ideals and standards in art and literature long before 1960s French philosophers arrived on the scene. Taking H. Stuart-Hughes' *Consciousness and Society*

⁸See Richard Rorty, “The Continuity Between the Enlightenment and ‘Postmodernism’,” in Baker and Reill, eds. *What's Left of Enlightenment?*, 19,

⁹See Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 217.

(1958) as a model, Carl E. Schorske, T.J. Jackson Lears, Marshall Berman and Modris Eksteins all offered book-length discussion of “modernist” movements in the period between 1880 and 1930.¹⁰

Lears expressed the modernist sensibility as a rejection of “a docile mass society — glutted by sensate gratification, ordered by benevolent governors, populated by creatures who have exchanged spiritual freedom and moral responsibility for economic and psychic security.”¹¹ In this sense, neither modernism nor modernity involves the expression or realization of some identifiable body of eighteenth-century values or ideals. On the contrary, modernism was an expression of an ongoing avant-garde reworking of established artistic styles, musical forms and literary strategies. Various avant-gardists — Dostoevsky, Klimt, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Cubists, Dadaists, Joyce, Miller and the Bloomsburies — subverted and rejected bourgeois values and traditions in art, literature, music and life.

From this historiographic perspective, it is patently absurd to suggest that Foucault, Lyotard and other French philosophers had just recently discovered a rejection of Enlightenment values. Quietly ignoring the intellectual history of the modernist movement of 1880-1930 serves the interest of contemporary French philosophy very well. As David Hollinger puts it:

«All those folks who thought everything had changed on or about December 1910 were kidding themselves. There was a big break, all right, but it did not take place in Bloomsbury on the eve of World War I. It took place in Paris 1968».¹²

The upshot is that when Foucault situates the emergence of modernity in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment — as he does in his College lectures as much as in *Discipline and Punish* (1975)¹³ — the effect is to consolidate the intellectual history of period from (say) 1750 to 1968 into a sufficiently uniform lump that it can be an object of a unified philosophical critique. Lyotard polarizes intellectual history still more sharply. He is not exhibiting greater historical sensitivity when he suggests (as we saw above) that the metanarratives that inform modernity emerge piecemeal from the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism, as well as from among the Annalists. In fact, he is

¹⁰ H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977 [1958]). Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981 [1961]). T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Modernism and Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988 [1982]). Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989).

¹¹ See Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 300.

¹² See David A. Hollinger, “The Enlightenment and the Genealogy of Cultural Conflict in the United States,” in Baker and Reill, eds. *What’s Left of Enlightenment?*, 12. Harold Mah argued a very similar point in his graduate seminar on Modernism at Queen’s University in 1992.

¹³ To be more specific, a sagittal or vertical (rather than longitudinal) modernity. See Michel Foucault, *The Government of the Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1982* (), 12-15.

showing *less*. All of history is suddenly divided into that time before 1968 when the gullible credulously accepted metanarratives, and the time after 1968 when French philosophers showed us the way of appropriate incredulity.

To be clear, none of this should be taken to suggest that either Foucault or Lyotard maintain that nothing of significance happened after (say) 1789 and before 1968. The much more restricted point on offer here is that taking a stand for “postmodernism” and then identifying modernism with the Enlightenment is to draw lines in the sand. You either fall into line behind those who wish to complete “the unfinished project of Enlightenment” or you join ranks with those who declare “the failure of the Enlightenment project.” Once the lines between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente were just this sharp, wars — the Culture Wars, the Science Wars and the Freud Wars — were inevitable.

The kinds of conflicts exhibited in the humanities in the 1980s and 1990s might have been more subdued and more subtle if more attention had been paid to the fact that categories of modernity and modernism might not be that tightly bound up with Enlightenment. Modernist art, music and literature have exhibited a remarkable and delightful iconoclastic propensity to break the rules and go about doing things the wrong way. Mondrian's sudden break with landscape art, Schoenberg's dodecaphony and Joyce's Bloom-ing confusion of literary convention are all paradigms of modernism. These iconoclasts have no obvious debts to Enlightenment ideals and values, nor are they merely a vanguard for postmodernism. They are simply avant-garde modernists, mostly dissatisfied with entrenched or bourgeois standards of taste. Likewise, arguments for the social construction of science, or about the scientific and therapeutic benefits of psychoanalysis, may be considered forms of avant-gardism. Given that modernism has been identified with an avant-garde rejection of accepted standards of rightness, there is little reason to closely identify modernity and Enlightenment. Moreover, given the piecemeal character of Enlightenment and the differing accounts of modernity, we need never have fever-pitched engagements with anything so grandiose and singular as either “the Enlightenment project” or “the modern project,” whatever either of those might be.

3. What is Enlightenment?

Since 2000, at least three substantial book-length studies on Kant and *Aufklärung* have been published along with a handful of journal articles. Now, Kant scholarship is something of a briar patch, more suited to hedgehogs than foxes. From outside the briar patch, it simply isn't clear how these new books fit within debates among Kant scholars. That said, from the outside, these new contributions are obviously all timely meditations on the postmodern critique of enlightenment. Given the tendentiousness of the concept of Enlightenment in the 1980s and 1990s, it is perhaps not surprising that critical attention has now turned to Kant's famous essay. Kant scholars like to emphasize that when Kant talks

about enlightenment in his essay he doesn't mean any kind of historical Enlightenment but rather a *process* of enlightening. An answer to "what is enlightening?" is divorced from eighteenth-century history and the history of knowledge in general (or, so it is argued).

The new literature on Kant's *Aufklärung* essay tends to adopt a common opening move: enlightenment (the process with a lowercase "e") embraced "otherness" in ways that belie stereotypes that portray it as being repressive, dominating, architectonic and demanding the subordination of sensibility to universal reason. The work here is to find a softer side of Kant, and in so doing, a kinder, gentler Kantian enlightenment. So, for example, Diane Morgan casts her work as explicitly rejecting the "institutionalised orthodoxy" that sees enlightenment reason as "the product of censorship, resulting in the repression of anything that is unpredictable and contingent, of anything that resists totalitarian order."¹⁴ Katerina Deligiorgi tells us that, "a proper understanding of the historical context and the real scope of Kant's conception of enlightenment should help us to resist the deflationary conclusions arising from one-sided accounts of the Enlightenment."¹⁵ Sam Fleischacker opens his study with the expansive observation that the Enlightenment is "a more diverse period than one might suppose from the way its opponents describe it, comprising advocates of sentiment as well as advocates of reason, champions of community as well as individualists, critics as well as defenders of empire, and a wide variety of other tendencies and views."¹⁶ Each of these authors opens their argument by emphasizing that the concept of enlightenment can embrace sensitivities to differences among opinions, cultural diversity and different ways of knowing. This opening move prompts, in one way or another, a return to Kant's original text in order to inspect his specific conception of enlightening.

The trouble with returning to Kant's original text, as it appeared in the pages of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1784, is that it is exceedingly sparse in the sense of being very short. This brevity invites a question that is at once textual and methodological: what texts, if any, are to be read as supporting or elaborating Kant's 1784 essay? There is no consensus on this matter. Morgan and Deligiorgi both take a very expansive approach. Kant's essay should be considered as coextensive with much of his *oeuvre* as well as much subsequent discussion of enlightenment. In contrast, James Schmidt situates Kant's essay mainly among the texts of other responses to the question of Enlightenment offered by Mendelssohn, Möhsen, Reinhold and others.¹⁷ Sam Fleischacker and Claude Piché offer

¹⁴See Diane Morgan, *Kant Trouble: The Obscurities of the Enlightened* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-2.

¹⁵ See Katerina Deligiorgi, *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2005), 185.

¹⁶See Samuel Fleischacker, *What is Enlightenment?* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

¹⁷See James Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

largely internalist readings of the essay, demanding that the essay be interpreted largely analytically.¹⁸

There is almost certainly no single right answer to the issue of interpretive approach. Differences about the scope of appropriate evidence will undoubtedly produce different characterisations of the main question, what is enlightening? That admitted, the following takes an entirely internalist approach in order to highlight some of the deep ambivalences in the *Aufklärung* essay, and to use those ambivalences to rethink the orientation of the essay's overall argument. Other than mere usefulness, this narrow approach is motivated by two contextual considerations.

First and very simply, if we accept, as Henry Allison, Schmidt and Piché all agree, that Kant is offering a *new* view of enlightenment, then this enjoins close attention to the details of the text.¹⁹ The other reason for an internalist reading is that it allows for the (admittedly controversial) possibility that the essay argues for a somewhat different position than Kant's other writings. After all, the *Aufklärung* essay was published in a monthly magazine oriented towards the intellectual interests and concerns of the *Berliner Mittwochsgesellschaft*. The question "What is Enlightenment?" had been posed by Johann Friedrich Zöllner in a footnote to another paper published in December 1783. As Schmidt points out, that the question was posed by Zöllner is likely "a sign of the intense interest in the question within the influential group of civil servants, clergy, and men of letters who made up the Wednesday Society."²⁰

Zöllner's question prompted at least two lectures in the Wednesday Society in late 1783 and early 1784, one by Johann Karl Wilhelm Möhsen (a personal physician to Frederick the Great and scholar of the history of science) and another by Moses Mendelssohn. Presumably, Mendelssohn's lecture was the basis for his essay "On the Question: What is Enlightenment" (1784) which appeared in September. When Kant's answer to Zöllner's question was published in December 1784, it appeared without Kant having read Mendelssohn's piece and likely without Kant having attended Society lectures. Given this immediate context, Kant would not necessarily have any expectation that his readers would be familiar with (much less convinced by) his previous philosophical writings, like the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). As Schmidt further observes, Kant's essay "could be readily understood by readers who knew little about Kant's system as a whole" and "it is unlikely that anyone at the time or that many in the decades that followed would have pursued these links."²¹ For this reason too, there is little reason to think that the *Aufklärung* essay must or ought to be considered "against the backdrop" of his future

¹⁸See Claude Piché, "Kant's Conception of Enlightenment: Aristocratic or Democratic," above.

¹⁹Allison, *Essays on Kant*, 229-235. Schmidt, "What is Enlightenment? A Question, Its Context, and Some Consequences" in Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?*, 1-2. Piché, above.

²⁰See James Schmidt, "Misunderstanding the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?': Venturi, Habermas, and Foucault" in *History of European Ideas* 37 (2011), 43-52 at 44.

²¹See Schmidt, "Misunderstanding the Question," 45.

work, like the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) or his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798).²²

Was is Aufklärung? begins on a stirring, almost heroic, note with its demand and challenge: *Sapere aude!* For me, the famous passage that follows still prompts a *frisson* even after many readings. “Enlightenment is man’s release from self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.”²³ Enlightenment is the courage to use your own understanding, and in so doing, shuck off self-incurred tutelage and achieve the adult autonomy that befits a mature human intellect.

The original passage in Horace, which is alluded to when *sapere aude* is invoked, may signal a second, different feature of enlightenment. Horace writes:

«Why indeed are you in a hurry to remove things which hurt the eye, while if aught is eating into your soul, you put off the time for cure till next year? Well begun is half done; dare to be wise; begin! He who puts off the hour of right living is like the bumpkin waiting for the river to run out: yet on it glides, and on it will glide, rolling its flood forever».²⁴

Being wise or enlightened is not about possessing any particular knowledge, as Kant scholars like to point out. But, for Horace, it isn’t clear if being wise even involves the possession of any particular skills or capacities either. Wisdom simply lies in undertaking the journey or process of enlightenment, rather than deferring the decision to set out by waiting for just the right moment. Simply to start is to be half-finished!

If *sapere aude* is just a prompt to start the process of enlightening, then it isn’t altogether clear what Kant means when he declares that the motto of enlightenment is, “Have courage to use your own reason!”²⁵ Does he mean that enlightenment is the simple willingness to undertake using your own reason, for better or worse regardless of outcome? Or, does he mean that enlightenment is, to borrow from Descartes, not just to use your reason but to learn to use your reason *rightly*?²⁶ This need not deny Kant’s precept that enlightening demands no particular knowledge. The skill, capacity or wherewithal to reason rightly would itself not be knowledge, if knowledge were construed simply as propositional knowledge. In other words, there are two possible accounts of enlightened

²² Allison makes this very odd claim. It isn’t at all clear why Kant’s *future work* would be a “backdrop” for the Enlightenment essay. See Allison, 229.

²³ Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in Sylvere Lotringer, *The Politics of Truth: Michel Foucault* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 7. Henceforth, referred to as WA.

²⁴ Horace, *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1978), 1.2.32-43,

²⁵ WA 7.

²⁶ Consider here Descartes’ *Meditation IV* at AT 55-57.

reason, one permissive and the other restrictive. On the restrictive account, enlightened reason is the use of reason to reach right or true conclusions. On the permissive account, so long as I use my reason “without direction from another” then I am engaged in enlightening.²⁷

The *Aufklärung* essay also expresses a related ambivalence about the extent to which the enlightening process itself is emancipatory. At the beginning of the essay, Kant explicitly links the process of enlightening with freedom and the public use of reason. In the essay's middle, the free, public use of reason is then connected very briefly with progress. There Kant tells us that “the proper destination” of “human nature” is “the progress in general enlightenment.”²⁸ Yet, the essay ends on a note that seems more restrictive than emancipatory: debate all you want, but obey! And moments later, Kant continues: “A greater degree of civil freedom appears advantageous to the freedom of mind of the people, and yet it places inescapable limitations upon it; a lower degree of civil freedom on the contrary, provides the mind with room for each man to extend himself to his full capacity.” We are told that as people become “capable of managing freedom” this will affect “the principles of government,” eventually at some undisclosed future point.²⁹

A third ambivalence arises from the question: who might be enlightened? The common answer to this question is: everyone who dares to use their reason. Allison, Deligiorgi, Fleischacker are very much agreed about this point. They do not hold that everyone is actually caught up in the process of enlightenment, but they agree that it is possible that everyone has the capacity to engage in the enlightening process, at least in principle. All three frame this inclusivity in terms of universalisability, though they don't agree about what is universal.

Fleischacker tells us that it is the potential to *self-legislate*: “we are all free: we have the ability to follow a law we lay down for ourselves, and not be led around by outside pressures.”³⁰ Allison describes it similarly in terms of *reflexivity*: “to ask oneself whether the ground of one's assumption can be regarded as suitable for all cognizers ... which amounts to a cognitive version of the principle of the universality of reasons...”³¹ This criterion by itself is almost certainly inadequate. It is all too open to the problem of self-deception in which being acceptable to a specific group is confused with universal validity. Recognizing this, Deligiorgi casts the universal *communicatively*: “the freedom to communicate with real interlocutors is essential, for without it we lose our capacity to even *think* freely.”³²

²⁷WA 7.

²⁸WA 14.

²⁹WA 18-19.

³⁰See Fleischacker, 14.

³¹See Allison, 233.

³²See Deligiorgi, 66.

Yet, as Claude Piché suggests in his contribution to this volume, there is a note of ambivalence in Kant's attitude towards universality. Piché writes: "enlightenment is potentially open to everyone" but at the same time "there is a modulation in the degree to which one has access to it."³³ It is certainly true that eighteenth-century Europe saw a rapid growth of literacy rates, particularly in cities and towns. But, Kant's insistence that ideas are communicated "through writing" suggests that more than rudimentary literacy is required to undertake enlightenment.³⁴ For that matter, Frederick II's 1763 *General-landschul-reglement* was arguably more a means of instilling social discipline and political authority than enlightened free-thinking.³⁵

Piché draws specific attention to Kant's hints that the pursuit of enlightenment is not open to just anyone. Early in the essay, Kant explicitly states that, "there are few who have succeeded by their own exercise of mind both in freeing themselves from incompetence and in achieving a steady pace." Thus, enlightening will depend on "some independent thinkers" who shall "disseminate the spirit ... of rational appreciation."³⁶ Traces of the "modulation" highlighted by Piché may be evident even in Horace. There the bumpkins or rustics (what Scottish *virtuosi* would have called "the rude" sort and Kant might have called "the great unthinking masses") are forever waiting for the right time and so never get to the work of enlightening.

The *Aufklärung* essay can be read as resonating with these uncertainties about education and literacy. Those to whom enlightenment is available are not even *Bürgers* or town-dwelling citizens but very specifically *Gelehrten* or scholars. This, Piché suggests, means that enlightenment may be more aristocratic than democratic. I think this suggestion is right in spirit but wrong in detail. As we have seen above, enlightenment is almost certainly unavailable to the illiterate, and it may not extend to farmers or labourers. But, this does not mean that Kant is arguing for a literal aristocratic enlightenment. As the next section of the paper will argue, Kant is arguing for an enlightening of what Daniel Defoe called "the middling sort" — he is calling for bourgeois enlightenment.

4. A Machiavellian Moment

Kant's three examples — the military officer, the tax collector, the clergyman — all occupy *bürgerlichen Posten* or civic offices. The duty of any *Bürger* while at their civil post is to perform their official duties: to pass on the lawful orders of superior officers, to collect the prescribed taxes and to convey church doctrine. A *Bürger* without a civil post

³³ See Piché, above.

³⁴ WA 14.

³⁵ For discussion, see James Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁶ WA 9.

had the duty to pay his taxes. Holding a civil post has the benefit of being paid, in one way or another, by the prince. The *Bürger* engaged in commerce is also provided for by the prince, since it is the prince's army that ensures the safety and stability that makes trade possible. Everyone has their civic duty.³⁷ Civic duty demands no more and no less than the efficient performance of the requirements of office, no criticisms and no complaints. Pay taxes, collect taxes, follow orders, preach doctrine. "Here argument is certainly not allowed — one must obey." Obedience may be demanded, Kant says, "without particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment." Perhaps more ominously he adds: "impudent complaints" about duties can, "be punished as a scandal (as it could occasion general refractoriness.)"³⁸

The requirement for obedience that comes with the performance of civic duty, however, involves a privation — that is, having something taken away, being deprived of something properly possessed. It is in this sense that civil posts are for Kant "private offices," not public offices as we might say. The conduct of a civil office requires the "the private use of reason." This privated form of reason is required "in the interest of the community" so government may direct people to public ends, or "at least prevent them from destroying those ends."³⁹ The point here is that while a modicum of reason may be required for civic duty, fulfillment of those duties may be incompatible with expressions of personal conscience. The officer, taxman or clergyman cannot simultaneously perform their duties and argue about what those duties are. And so, the deprivation involved in private reason is the suspension of "the free use of reason in matters of conscience."

Fully-fledged reason without privation — what Kant calls "the public use of reason" — is the activity of *Gelehrten* or scholars. Scholars are entitled to publically express disagreements about taxes and how they are collected, appropriate military service and religious orthodoxies. Scholarly activity and the public use of reason are very much the same thing. It is the scholar who "publicly expresses his thoughts" and the scholar's writings "speak to his public, the world."⁴⁰ The free or public use of reason is "the use which a person makes of it as a scholar before the reading public," and "the public use of reason enjoys an unlimited freedom to use his own reason and to speak in his own person."⁴¹ Scholars are engaged in the public use of reason when they "communicate to the public ... carefully tested and well-meaning thoughts on that which is erroneous."⁴²

This is all stirring stuff but we should be extraordinarily careful how we construe Kant's statements about scholarly activity. There is a temptation to read what Kant says

³⁷ This is indebted to John Christian Laursen, "The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of 'Public' and 'Publicity'" in Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?*, 253-270.

³⁸ WA 10-11.

³⁹ WA 11.

⁴⁰ WA 11 and 13.

⁴¹ WA 10 and 13.

⁴² WA 12.

about scholarship as implying any number of liberal-democratic values. For example, it is tempting to suggest something like: the public use of reason implies communicating with a public so this, in turn, implies an absence of censorship, which, in turn, implies freedom of the press. This is an enticing chain of reasoning as it would align Kant with our contemporary political beliefs and sensibilities. But, notice that the use of “implies” here suggests a deep logical connection where there simply is none. There is no modern logical proof to show that freedom of the press may be derived from the public use of reason. To suggest otherwise is to take a moral from logic, and since that doughty neo-Kantian Rudolph Carnap, logicians have been agreed that in logic there are no morals (or politics for that matter). The sense of ‘implies’ involved in claims connecting the public use of reason with freedom of the press is semantic not logical. This is the sense of ‘implies’ that one finds in an assertion like: that the house is red all over implies that the house is not black all over.

So consider, for example, Kant’s claim that, “One might let every citizen ... in the role of scholar, make his comments freely and publicly, through writing, on the erroneous aspect of the present institution.”⁴³ This particular passage might be read as implying the broad claim that the status of scholar could be extended to every citizen. It might also be read narrowly as implying merely that every citizen *qua* scholar can voice their public opinion. Either or both of these readings might be correct. But, all of us who have children also understand that the “might” can be used as a proxy for “no.” Even children recognize that we mean “no” when we say: we won’t order pizza today but we might later in the week. The semantic problem is compounded once we acknowledge that the meaning of many key philosophical concepts have shifted over time, even basic terms like “experience” and “objectivity.”⁴⁴ Given the shifting sands of concept-meanings, there is just no certainty about what expressions like “public use of reason” and “communicating with a public” may have entailed for Kant.

If, for a moment, we resist the temptation to reconstruct the semantic implications of Kant’s concepts, then another and quite different reading of *Was ist Aufklärung?* might be discerned. As has been shown, Kant is ambivalent about the universality of enlightening as well as the sanctity of enlightening. That is, he doesn’t make clear whether everyone can become scholars, and he leaves open the possibility that some public uses of reason might be quashed as inimical to civic order. Finally, he is silent about when enlightenment will be achieved, as he reminds us that we live in an age of Enlightenment but not an enlightened age. Given these and the other ambivalences noted above, it seems unlikely that the main point of the *Aufklärung* essay is that: “The public use of one’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men.”⁴⁵

⁴³ WA 14.

⁴⁴Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007). Alan W. Richardson, “Conceiving, Experiencing, and Conceiving Experiencing: Neo-Kantianism and the History of the Concept of Experience,” *Topoi* 22 (1) (2003), 55-67.

⁴⁵ WA 10.

Kant is clearly advancing this claim but he does so in a register that is strikingly ambivalent about what this means, who is involved and its future prospect, as we have already seen.

Note that there are just a few actors in the *Aufklärung* essay: the officer, the tax collector, the clergyman, the scholar and prince. In our commentaries, we all too often focus on the first four actors at the expense of the prince. Perhaps Kant's intended audience for the essay was not the world-community of scholars, or even the readership of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. Perhaps the intended audience was aristocratic, namely the prince. "This," declares Kant, "is the age of enlightenment, or the century of Friedrich."⁴⁶ If Kant is trying to say something to the prince, then what is he trying to say? The point is not to argue for greater civil freedom since Kant maintains without any hint of irony that, "a lower degree of civil freedom ... provides the mind with room for each man to extend himself to his full capacity."⁴⁷ Nor is the point to argue that a prince ought to respect the capacity of all persons to become scholars and engage in "the public use of reason." If this point had to be argued for, then the argument would be futile! Why would a prince give up any power whatsoever to the weak on the basis of anything so flimsy as an argument, a mere collection of words? Assuming that power responds to reason is not merely naive, it is question-begging. Thus, the essential point that Kant wishes to convey to the prince is this: it is *unbefitting the office of a prince* to be concerned with the petty squabbles of scholars.

If Kant can sustain this critical point, then the free public use of reason is immediately assured. Towards the end of the essay, the focus of the argument shifts to the prince and reaches its culmination. There we are told:

«A prince who does not find it unworthy of himself to say that he holds it to be his duty to prescribe nothing to men in religious matters but give them complete freedom while renouncing the haughty name of *tolerance*, is himself enlightened».⁴⁸

The enlightened prince — the prince who will be honoured and glorified — understands that it is a duty of his office as prince not to legislate matters of religion, or the arts and sciences. The reason for this, however, is not any specific kind of commitment to the form of tolerance found in, for example, Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689). Lockean tolerance is inappropriate because the prince simply has no duty or requirement to maintain toleration. If the prince did have such a duty, then this would demand a princely concern about matters of religious conscience and proper care of the soul. In contrast with Locke's

⁴⁶ WA 16.

⁴⁷ WA 18.

⁴⁸ WA 16.

magistrate who has a deep interest in maintaining religious tolerance, Kant's prince is comparatively indifferent to such matters.

Princely indifference is also a benign indifference, since it leaves "each man free to make use of his reason in matters of conscience."⁴⁹ The only concern the prince has with matters of conscience is the prevention of civil strife, "to prevent one of them from violently hindering another in determining and promoting this welfare."⁵⁰ Any further involvement in matters of conscience "injures" the prince's majesty by supporting the, "despotism of some tyrants in his state over his other subjects." In general, "to meddle in these matters lowers his own majesty."⁵¹ This does not, of course, prevent the prince from considering the "general and widely approved" conclusions of scholarship that have been brought forward as "a proposal to the throne." The prince may even enact such proposals if the suggested "improvement stands together with civil order."⁵² The prince insists only on civil order in the form of obedience to the prescribed duties of private office. Not only is it unbecoming of a prince to worry about scholarly squabbles, Kant suggests, it is a rare and worthy prince indeed who will permit the scholars to debate as much as they please, so long as they obey. In a thinly veiled allusion to Friedrich II, Kant adds, "Of this we have a shining example wherein no monarch is superior to him who we honor."⁵³

Kant's crucial point in the *Aufklärung* essay is not that the aim of the process of enlightening is to make every person a scholar, no matter how attractive and flattering twenty-first-century academics might find this idea. Reading *Was ist Aufklärung?* through the lens of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) shows how Kant thinks of the prince as his principal audience.⁵⁴ This approach also makes sense of the early part of the essay. There Kant shows that there is no threat to civic order if a person who holds a civic office also engages in public expressions of conscience "without infringing on their official duties."⁵⁵ Having a *bürgerlichen Posten* is not incompatible with being *Gelehrten*. The officer, tax collector, clergyman and others who hold civic office can be free to pursue matters of personal conscience when they are not discharging their duties. The precise demarcation being drawn out by Kant is not between the *oikos* and the *polis*, or between the private and the political. The demarcation being drawn is between the personal and the occupational. We are all familiar with a more recent, and very bourgeois, form of just this distinction: from 9A-5P on weekdays, I go to work and do my job and discharge my duties to the state as an employee and taxpayer, but outside of those hours, what I say and do is my own personal business.

⁴⁹ WA 17.

⁵⁰ WA 15.

⁵¹ WA 16.

⁵² WA 14-15.

⁵³ WA 18.

⁵⁴ And, of course, also through the lens of J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁵⁵ WA 17.

5. Pulling Modernity and Enlightenment Apart

In the *Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard asks: “Who has the right to decide for society? Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they obligate?” The modern (rather than postmodern) way to answer these questions, he says, is to use the model of scientific rationality:

«The people debate among themselves about what is just or unjust in the same way that the scientific community debates about what is true or false; they accumulate civil laws just as scientists accumulate scientific laws; they perfect their rules of consensus just as the scientists produce new “paradigms” to revise their rules in light of what they have learned».⁵⁶

On this account, progress in politics is achieved in much the same way as progress in science, and both enterprises are conceived as a process of collective deliberation, universal legislation and progressive accumulation. As we have already seen, Lyotard's strong suit is not historical nuance. All that is offered is a generic claim about the character of scientific rationality and its homology with some account of political decision-making. It isn't evident that scientific rationality ever conformed to the pattern Lyotard suggests, or if those rules have ever been deployed in politics. Even if Lyotard has offered a description of what Kant and other *philosophes* aspired to as an ideal of enlightened politics, it isn't clear that this is also a description of modernity.

In recent philosophical literature, modernity and modernism has been equated with Enlightenment so that modernity and Enlightenment can be substituted *salva veritate*. The historical moment of modernity was the Scientific Revolution and the subsequent Age of Enlightenment. This is, so the usual story goes, when we became modern. The philosophical movement called the “Enlightenment project” and the “modern project” is the realisation of the ideals, values and ambitions given expression in this historical period. The bringing together of the concepts of modernity and Enlightenment so that they are now almost synonymous is the outcome of a quite recent turn in philosophy effected by the work of Foucault, Lyotard, Habermas and others. This rethinking of the philosophical project of Enlightenment and modernity invites reinterpretation of the history, just as historiographic reimaginings of the Enlightenment period tend to adjust the aims of the philosophical project. The recent philosophical shift now reverberates in the

⁵⁶See Lyotard, 30.

historiography of the Enlightenment in the form of a new historiographic emphasis on the so-called “postmodern enlightenment.”

There are, however, other historiographic resources that might help us doubt the collapse of Enlightenment and modernity into each other. A slightly older and now obscured historiography traces the ideas of modernism and modernity not to the Enlightenment but to the avant-garde movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These movements in art, literature and music push the boundaries of what is established and accepted as appropriate conventions, ideals and values. As Clement Greenberg wrote in the *Partisan Review* in 1939, a society, “as it becomes less and less able... to justify the inevitability of its particular forms, breaks up the accepted notions upon which artists and writers must depend in large part for communication with their audiences.” The work of avant-gardists is to depart from “a motionless Alexandrianism” and “academicism” — to dissolve “the precedent of the old masters.”⁵⁷

Pace Greenberg, we tend to identify avant-gardism with the achievements of new paradigms in literature, art and music, and specifically, the historical moments of Eliot, Joyce, Picasso, Braque, Schoenberg, Duchamp and Pollock. But, we could also argue that the avant-garde sensibility has been at work in science and philosophy as well. Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr and recently Ilya Prigogine are arguably avant-garde scientists, and Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers their philosophical exegetes. From this point of view, avant-garde modernity is a movement of movements. As a movement, it is iconoclastic, irreverent and a little seditious. In its specific movements, it variously resists the reification of norms, and even their sedimentation. In so doing, it (by definition) opposes entrenched, bourgeois sensibilities and resists *any* fixed conception of Enlightened values. The avant-garde rejection of enlightenment values should not, however, be confused with a rejection of modernity. Avant-gardes embrace modernity! They are modernists! How then should we explain how modernity and enlightenment come apart? This becomes clearer in the analysis of Kant’s *Aufklärung* essay.

On the close reading of *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* offered here, it is possible to discern an implicit Kantian schism between modernity and enlightenment. If we look beyond the *Aufklärung* essay, as many Kant scholars recommend and insist, we perhaps see Kant’s particular anticipation of what the process of enlightenment could achieve. Allison takes Kant’s vision to be a “principle of the universality of reasons” which is the idea that, “if something justifies my belief, it must also justify the belief of any other rational being under similar conditions.”⁵⁸ Fleischacker argues for what he calls a “minimal Enlightenment” which is a condition where, “One is enlightened if one holds one’s beliefs as a result of thinking responsibly for oneself, rather

⁵⁷Clement Greenberg, “Avante-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6:5 (1939), 34-49.

⁵⁸Allison, 233.

than as dogma. Roughly, this means that one seeks reasons for beliefs, opens them to correction by others ...”⁵⁹

These are both compelling descriptions of Kant's vision of Enlightenment, though Kant's articulation of it offered in the *Aufklärung* essay is noticeably equivocal. Whatever he says elsewhere, in that essay Kant is strikingly ambivalent. While he clearly thinks that the process of enlightening is underway in Friedrich's Prussia, the realization of enlightenment is ongoingly thrust into a millennialist future. He also isn't clear to whom it applies. At times, he says everyone, eventually, at some undisclosed future time. In the meantime, enlightening is available only to select scholars who make free public use of reason. The promise of enlightenment is also ambivalent. Whether or not it will eventually lead to better government is described in caveated terms. If Kant has a quite definite view of enlightenment in mind, as Kant scholars suggest he does, then it is difficult to give an account of these equivocations. My suggestion is that the recurring ambivalences makes sense if the aim of the *Aufklärung* essay is a defense of a specific conception of modernity as a condition for the possibility of enlightening, not any specific conception of enlightenment.

From this perspective, as Kant writes the *Aufklärung* essay he is speaking to the readers of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* but he is addressing the prince. In the way of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Kant accedes that the concern of the modern prince — the official duty of the prince — is to maintain civil order. The prince does this by maintaining civil obedience. Maintaining civil order is no mean feat, and it requires the judicious use of force. On the one hand, the prince cannot be a thug, like Agathocles who created order by vicious executions. On the other hand, the prince cannot be weak and make the mistake of the Florentines in Pistoia who granted clemency to rebels only then to be faced with the bloody task of subduing an insurrection. While difficult to maintain, civic order is essential for *Gelehrten* to go about their public work of enlightening; as Hobbes highlighted, there can be no art, commerce or industry in the state of nature.

Kant's specific advice to the prince is that it is a mistake to believe that civil order requires consensus or agreement amongst those who are ruled. The maintenance of civil order depends only on the efficient performance of civic duty and nothing else. So long as the officer, tax collector, clergyman and other officials discharge their duties of office without question, they can disagree on their own time about how taxes are distributed, military aims are pursued, and ecclesiastic doctrines are preached. Order requires obedience alone. Once this is recognized then it follows that it is unbecoming a prince to be concerned with matters of conscience. Indeed, deigning to participate in public arguments might lead to the dangerous misunderstanding that such issues even could have a bearing on the matter of civil obedience. The prince's overriding injunction is: “Argue as much as

⁵⁹ Fleischacker, 169.

you will, and about what you will, only obey!” This command is backed up by the threat of “a numerous and well-disciplined army.”⁶⁰

“A republic could not dare say such a thing,” Kant whispers, recognizing that with the separation of the personal and occupational the classical republican tradition has been eclipsed.⁶¹ In the republican model, deliberation and consensus-building in the *agora* was the basis of political authority. What Kant understands — or perhaps better what Kant built — but Lyotard doesn’t understand is that classical republicanism is not the model of modernity. In modernity, political authority demands civil order, and it is organised around the model of positive law (rules backed up by threats). Only once civil order is guaranteed can there be a modernity in the form of the free public use of reason on all matters of conscience. The modern allowance for the free public use of reason is enlightening, and over time, a consensus about enlightenment values *might* be achieved. By contrast, avant-gardists are arch-moderns, but they reject all claims to consensus about enlightened values. Thus, modernity and enlightenment come apart in a strange modal asymmetry. While modernity is necessary for enlightenment, enlightenment is merely possible under conditions of modernity.

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⁶⁰ WA 18.

⁶¹ WA 18.

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