

Foreword

One talks about the Enlightenment and its opposite, the counter-Enlightenment, as though thinkers in intellectual history could easily be deposited in one or other of the categories. The aim of this special edition is twofold: one, to discuss whether such a poorly nuanced historical categorization does service to those thinkers on the periphery of ethical, political and social thought. And two, to trace the relationship of the counter-enlightenment (and necessarily its opposite) to violence, conflict and protest. The aim of the journal as a whole is to reinstate certain possible alternatives into the heart of our historical tradition through the reorientation and weakening of the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment binary opposition.

First, the point of departure is a rather uncontroversial claim: the Enlightenment is a complex and multi-faceted historical phenomenon that embodies certain core identifying features. These features are political and epistemic egalitarianism, publicity and reciprocity of reason, the rejection of theology as a grounding explanatory discourse and its progressive replacement by the methodologies and axioms of natural science and, finally, the widespread belief in both social and intellectual progress.¹ However, even if the defining characteristics of the movement as a whole can be delineated, the concept is best understood as an umbrella of many movements and individual writers, crossing geographical and temporal borders, and one can no more characterize an individual thinker given these broad features than one can say something informative about a particular individual based on generalities about groups. Rather, these features ought to properly operate as a family resemblance bound together by the general spirit of emancipation from superstition and political oppression and empowerment through knowledge.² There do perhaps exist thinkers who express all of the particular commitments in their work, but it would be a mistake to demand of each thinker that they express all of these features; for example, Berkeley, Descartes and Locke unashamedly use theological justifications as a form of warrant. However, it is the assumption that an Enlightenment thinker can be identified by necessary and sufficient conditions that allows any thinker who expresses political conservatism (Burke, Hegel, de Maistre), a consideration of cyclical history (Machiavelli; Vico, Spengler), a-scientism (Vico, Hamann, Hegel) or the use of arguments from authority to be labelled as a counter-Enlightenment figure (Machiavelli). Even though a thinker can be theological and yet still belong to Enlightenment thought, a thinker cannot deny metaphysical monism or reductionism and still hope to belong. Modern scientific rationalism, handed down by the natural sciences, becomes the hallmark of Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment figures often deny some of the other features of Enlightenment and supposed counter-Enlightenment thinkers often share some of those very features. If a family resemblance is the correct way to interpret the historical phenomenon, then exclusion of thinkers due to the priority of scientific rationalism from that tradition may well have arisen from a different consideration. One aim of the following

¹ See for further discussion, Maurice Mendelbaum, *History, Man and Reason: a Study in Nineteenth Century Thought* (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); and James Schmidt (ed.), *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth century answers and twentieth century questions* (London: University of California Press, 1996).

² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

articles, and their grouping, is to challenge this unsophisticated understanding of intellectual history.

Second, conflict is seen as a precursor to change, when the social and political order strains at its edges and pulls its centre into full view. At its extreme, this manifests itself as violence. However, conflict and protest are traditionally understood as liberal: the individual or rational group protesting a moral wrong on the part of the wronged; or revolutionary whereby a different, higher order is proposed as a better alternative. The liberal paradigm has always seen reason as the perfect antidote to violence, one need think no further than Hobbes or Locke's originary rejection of violence at the inception of the state. Yet, many of the writers in this volume, and the counter-enlightenment more broadly has understood the dominance of reason differently. The liberal investment in reason may just be the arbitrary reifications of a particular culture's lifeworld (Vico, Hamann, Landauer, Spengler, Sartre), the preference-interests of a particular culture (Hume, Burke, Hamann), the interest-expressions of a ruling class (Marx, Landauer, Sartre), the reification of instrumental-technical reason (Hamann, Spengler, the Frankfurt school) or the expression of power relations (de Maistre, Landauer, Sartre, Foucault). Consequences of these challenges are theoretical, undermining the reliability of the sovereign subject and its claim to universal reason, and also practical, revealing how violence emerges from the sense of entitlement which comes from abstract individual rights.³ In this, conservatives and communitarians have often seemed quietist, resigned to the status quo and prepared to let the slow-moving wheels of history to effect the change and not the arbitrary and wilful whims of individuals. And such quietism is a ready-made excuse for violence exemplified in Hegel's own odd views of wars as nothing more than a version of patriotism in a World Cup year, or Vico's celebration of the brutish heroic age, or Machiavelli's reversal of moral virtues in the realm of politics. Here, though, the overarching theme is to present intellectual thinkers who saw the imposition of enlightenment reason as violence but also cultivated a response, resistance or alternative to it.

So, what alternative to liberalism is there if one is to resist the power techniques of the state, of culture and of tradition? Reason and rational modes of thought are often seen as the bastion against the acceleration of conflict into violence and the goal of the Enlightenment tradition was, in a large part, to liberate individuals from those irrational superstitions and beliefs which were at the base of these conflicts. However, many critiques of the Enlightenment project, both historical and more contemporary, see the imposition of universal reason as itself a form violence, ignoring claims of comprehensive traditions, identity and history on the individual. The aim of this special edition is to examine possible counter-enlightenment approaches to violence, conflict and conflict resolution. "The lines of morality are not like ideal lines of mathematics," Burke said. "They admit of exceptions; they demand modifications. These exceptions and modifications are not made by the process of logic, but by the rules of prudence."⁴ Here, violence is revealed to be a consequence of Enlightenment thought, yet is also seen as restorative, or is celebrated as a necessary expression of freedom. All in all, these are alternatives and it is for the reader to decide whether they are plausible or not. The contributions follow a chronological path in terms of principal thinkers in order to pose the question whether a tradition of counter-enlightenment thought on conflict and violence can be established. Whether it can or not, is a judgement I

³ Expressed so eloquently in Hegel's repeated description of the Terror which follows revolutions, see for example, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 582-595.

⁴ Edmund Burke, "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, ed. F. W. Raffety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), volume 5, 19.

leave to the reader. The journal begins with a consideration of the foremost critic of European revolutionary action, the Irishman Edmund Burke (1729-1797). Grigoriou offers the reader an original angle to approach the work of Burke, demonstrating that conservative reactions to violence and oppression are often more nuanced and less disingenuous than their liberal opponents. Conservative reflection on oppression is situated in care and concern, sympathy broadly understood, and not formulaic principles or the inhuman rule of law; tyranny and violence arise from a lack of respect and when one cannot feel sympathy for the other. The *laissez faire* economics and the principled moral rule of law of liberals is not enough to resist tyranny, it also requires sympathy with the oppressed. Charles Djordjevic explores Hamann's (1730-1788) reflections of the leading figure of the Enlightenment and his nuanced, immanent rejection of Kant's overly rationalistic and pure defence of Enlightenment ideals of reasoning. The argument reminds the reader that the Enlightenment's avowal of rationalism depends on a hidden, silent underpinning of state and intellectual violence. Progressing from the beginnings of the reaction to the Enlightenment, the next three articles concentrate on the French nobleman Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821). Rosenberg's article reassesses Maistre's ideas on war and violence and his disquiet at the drift of European societies into sheer militarism. He sees the thought of de Maistre as seeking a foundation which would limit war by turning his attention to the more irrational and mythic elements of human culture, as a way of instituting a framework for the curbing of violence.

The second essay by de Blanda investigates de Maistre once more, but this time in parallel with Bonald (1754-1840), and how positive attitudes towards the French revolution can quickly sour when false and overly idealistic promises are revealed to be hopeless. Such feelings arise from dread when faced with the unrelentless violence of the Terror, when one is made aware of the necessity of history's relentless wearing down of individual acts and personalities into insignificance and the realisation of the false idea of revolution as grounded in the logic of progress when history remains cyclical. A sort of cosmological Manichaeism legitimates the Terror of revolution as a divine punishment own to men, risking man made nihilism and the death of God.

In the third and final article on the French thinker, Wilson uses his discussion to contextualize the conservative thought of de Maistre, Donoso and Schmitt in relation to contemporary social thinkers, most notably Agamben and Foucault. For them, the unwritten constitution of England is a paradigm to avoid revolution which is necessarily brought about by the contradictory natures of both liberalism and socialism. The need for authority and the imposition of violent reason comes from the failures of these political movements and a return to earlier pre-revolutionary forms of community is the only way to nullify social violence. Wilson also supplies the first English translation of one of Donoso's letters for contextualization.

Lucet's paper focuses on anarchism and the attempt by Gustav Landauer (1870-1919) to offer a non-systematic, yet plausible, anarchism that refuses violence on both its rational and consequential grounds. As this article explains, Landauer's refusal to let scientific explanations direct all aspirations for social transformation and his rejection of violent means of action are just two sides of the same unorthodox version of anarchism: he refuses means to ends justification (unlike other political agents) and reinterprets violence as an overcoming of social alienation. Violence's object can only be the self. Unlike the vulgar materialist readings of Marx, Landauer carves out a space for political action rather than the descriptions of science. What we learn is that the rampant individualism of Enlightenment thought, the self-understanding of ourselves as individuals, poses the greatest obstruction to social progress.

Continuing this theme, Swer's article reminds the reader that Spengler (1880-1936) saw reason itself as a violent anti-cultural force. The rise of instrumental reason and its inherent

violence is somehow necessary to the form of Western culture. However, rather than see this as grounds to reject the rise of technology and modernity, Spengler sees the violence of technical thought as a liberation. Contrary to superficial reactionary readings of Spengler, the author reminds the reader that the idealisation of the past is nearly always a regressive strategy or an act of oppression. Whereas the liberal shies away from overt violence, to assert and re-assert the violence of an exceptional reason, Spengler, like Hegel in his lectures on political philosophy and the Italian futurists after him, sees violence as a way to affirm historical consciousness and renew tired and old cultures which promote inauthenticity.

Spengler's restorative understanding of violence has much in common with Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) later political work. The final piece, my own contribution, seeks to reveal in greater depth why the liberal approach to protest and resistance is culturally inappropriate and to follow late Sartre's Hegelian-Marxist reinterpretation of existentialism as a violent group endeavour as the political expression of freedom. The violence of reason and its cultural authenticity demand the impossibility of doing nothing.

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