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# Peripheries of Enlightement



WYDAWNICTWA UNIWERSYTETU WARSZAWSKIEGO
WUW

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# HOW TO STUDY THE ENLIGHTENMENT? STUDY AND DEFEND

**Abstract**

We live in a time of uncertainty and transition. Some would claim that Enlightenment has already died (Kissinger, in Bendyk 2018, and Agata Bielik-Robson 2019), and its values are no longer relevant to our values. However, quite recently, some outstanding scientists, like Steven Pinker (2018), have published a good defence of the Enlightenment, claiming instead that we need the Enlightenment values. What follows is a quick overview of the defences of the Enlightenment from Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas, and Todorov, Nussbaum and others to Pinker, arguing for pragmatic rationality. Rationality, even if it is impossible to define it with any universality from the objectivist point of view (Cartesian rationalism is impossible to defend), then it may function, together with human dignity, as a multi-faced criterium for intersubjective reality and tolerant, peaceful society.

**Keywords:**

## Introduction

In order to contemplate the issue of how to study the Enlightenment, we should first notice what methodological patterns have been driving critics and defenders of the Enlightenment heritage in the 20th and 21st centuries. We should assume the existence of unconscious history like Braudel did, whom we must thank for the reflection on the role of the "long durée" in the history of civilisation. (Braudel, 1960; cf. Kula, 2000; Wichrowska, 2011). This broad perception of civilisational processes has driven both critics and defenders of the Enlightenment. We cannot ignore the fact that the topic of the Enlightenment is now attractive not only to historians of the historical period carrying this name; "the Enlightenment" stokes the passion of many philosophers, critics, and scientists because it is associated on many levels with issues of civilisation

and culture which are still valid, and which are better seen if we measure them using the category of long durée.

This perspective enables us to notice parts of the 18th-century model in the 21st century and perceive the origin of specific processes of the 18th century within the more broadly defined modern period, whose origins can be found in the Renaissance.

One of my main theses is that the process of the Enlightenment began with the ideas of the Reformation, which was known to the people of the Enlightenment themselves, e.g., Immanuel Kant. On the one hand, the Enlightenment contains such ideas as "common-sense thinking" (this is not the best-formulated term since it can also mean a sense of that which is common, common reason, *sensus communis*); tolerance (sometimes we can get the impression that the Enlightenment was a reaction to the time of the fanatical, intolerant war of the Puritans); rational debate, cafés (Habermas saw in them the origins of the modern public space), dialogic imagination, and impartiality (along with the origins of the separation of powers and constitutional thought, and the development of journalism as an institution of the Fourth Estate).

On the other hand, all these ideas can be seen as associated with the Christian ideas of Mercy, Grace, the Bible, Congregation (as a Church), Autobiography, and the principle of "Loving your enemies."

On the one hand, philology and multilingual Bibles are being written during the Reformation; on the other hand, there is a polyphony of voices in the Enlightenment; the system of checks and balances within a state can be seen in this context as equal to the supervision of laypeople and the balance of representative bodies in the Church.

## Criticism and defence of the Enlightenment

We can find several critical approaches to the Enlightenment in the 20th and 21st centuries. First, we must mention the Frankfurt School, mainly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1994) and Jurgen Habermas (2007). However, we can also mention Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a critic of totalitarianism and the cult of a great leader; in the recent sociology of culture, Zygmunt Bauman was a significant figure. Pope John Paul II seemed to be a critic of the Enlightenment, and his perception of the Holocaust in this context seemed quite like that of Bauman's. His friend and supporter, Benedict XVI, said in 2011: "We must dismount from the high horse of our 'enlightened' reason." (Benedict, 2011). We should emphasise that Solzhenitsyn, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI represent the attitude that we ought to call "anti-communist" in the

political sense. On the other hand, the Frankfurt School of critical theory was primarily critical of the persecuting fascist totalitarianism.

Therefore, one can argue that some attempts to criticise the values of the Enlightenment were only superficially critical because they intended to defend other values originating in the Enlightenment. In recent times, however, we can find many extensive works confidently called "modern apologia of the Enlightenment": Schmidt, 1996; Cascardi, 1999; Neiman, 2008; Todorov, 2009; Pinker, 2018 (published in Poland in 2019).

## The greatest problem of the heritage of the Enlightenment, of modernity

In his *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) (published in Poland under the title "Nowoczesność i Zagłada" in 2009), Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) says that the Shoah is a common problem of western civilisation. Its roots lie in modernity. If we think of the Holocaust as a problem of Germans, not of others, not of civilisation, then this perspective implies the existence of THEM, who are evil and somewhere far from us. The enemy is presented as an isolated thing. It is a closed problem. The problem of evil vanishes pressed into the substance of the radically other. Instead, Bauman asks us to look at the Holocaust differently. The Holocaust is a problem of modernity whose roots touch the Enlightenment. In his contemplations, he invokes Richard Rubenstein and John Roth. The Holocaust is a problem in Western civilisation because many of its instruments have been used in the process of destruction and liquidation. It is not just an issue of using tools in the literal sense that Nazi Germany used trains and engineering and gas chambers, which would not be possible without the advances in contemporary chemistry. The railway, steam locomotives, and killing gas all required the development of civilisation, science, and culture.

Nonetheless, in this context, it is striking that Bauman comments on the institutions of modern contemporary bureaucracy, which is a fundamental concept because the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office was responsible for the Holocaust, responsible for the "Final Solution." Therefore, modern management thinking and economic reason are partially responsible for the criminal nature of actions taken by Hitler's Germany. Such perception does not lie far from that of other people who, e.g. blamed (blame) IBM for collaborating with the Third Reich because they sold them the technology of punched cards used by Nazis, e.g. to segregate prisoners in camps.

(In fact, IBM leased this technology, cf. Black, 2001 et seq.) Thus, if Enlightenment thought, otherwise now called modern thought, is re-

sponsible for such a tragic development in the history of humanity, is it still possible to defend the Enlightenment?

## How, then, should we defend the Enlightenment? Todorov and Foucault

Tzvetan Todorov said that the foundations of the Enlightenment project comprise three ideas that cause their unpredictable consequences: autonomy of the subject, the human goal of our actions, and universality. (Todorov, 2009, 4–5). He writes that attacks on the Enlightenment and its legacy will never cease and can even escalate. It is, therefore, even more, necessary to keep the spirit of the Enlightenment alive:

> The age of maturity that past authors were hoping would come seems not to be the destiny of humankind: humanity is condemned to seek truth rather than possess it. Asked if we were already living 'in an enlightened age,' Kant wrote, 'the answer is No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment.' (91). This would be the vocation of our species: to pick up the task of Enlightenment with each new day, knowing that it is interminable.[1]

In this way, Todorov seems to follow the footsteps of Michel Foucault, who, in his sketch about defining the Enlightenment (Foucault, 2000), defined the Enlightenment as an attitude of criticism, not as an age of maturity, which is unattainable; the road to maturity passes through criticism. It is a defence of the values of the Enlightenment from the point of view of the philosophy of history and social philosophy. The main subject of this defence is the solidarity of human beings against the ubiquitous spirit of prison (with its principle of "Supervise and Punish" and with the economic and utilitarian invention of Bentham's Panopticon) and the so-called Gardening State, according to which everything that grows unintentionally must be weeded out. The Gardening State is a metaphor dominated by other conceptualisations, e.g., the flower–weed opposition. The Gardening State is a subject of criticism; nonetheless, we should know that it also has its parallels in both IBM's digital technology and the management models of the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office. How then can we defend the Enlightenment outside a philosophical attitude devoted to criticism?

A satisfying answer can be the approach of Susan Neiman. She presents Abraham as a modern protagonist comparable to Ulysses. According to Neiman, an individual approach to the idea of justice can be found in the mythical Ulysses and the Bible's Abraham, when he

[1] Todorov, 2009, pp. 150–151.

participates in lengthy negotiations with God prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Neimann, for the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, twentieth century philosophy's most important critique of the Enlightenment, *The Odyssey* was the beginning of the end. Its authors, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer saw the epic as commencing the slow descent of the human spirit. Odysseus, the authors argue, was the prototype of the Enlightenment. "The first modern novel showed the first modern man: uprooted, cool, and dispassionate, driven to seek the world and find everything but his soul. His wiles always work, but the cost is immense. Premodern heroes, they wrote, try to control the world through the relatively harmless ritual murder of bulls and goats. Modern heroes sacrifice themselves. Premodern heroes were subject to the tyranny of superstition and brute force; with internalised repression, modern heroes invented something even cruder. Odysseus blinds the Cyclops, but in calling himself Nobody he negates not only his name, but his essence. And the captain who stops up his sailors' ears and binds himself to the mast to get past the Sirens foreshadows the modern capitalist, driving himself and his workers relentlessly through a denatured world. As compensation, he treats himself to an occasional opera ticket; the workers are denied even that." (Neiman, p. 318). And earlier, she says: "Reason is a way of fighting back against contingencies, from injustice to illness, that stand in the way of satisfaction and sense. Will it always win? Of course not. But do you really want to give up the contest from the start? (Neiman, p. 225). Abraham is a person during negotiations, dialogue, and who dares to ask God questions.

## Steven Pinker's apologia of the Enlightenment

However, the most interesting recent defence of the Enlightenment must be Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*. The English title seems much clearer (compared to the Polish one) and can be seen as an imperative: Enlightenment now! Pinker, a philosopher of history, cognitivist, cultural anthropologist, but also a kind of a sociologist using "big data," reviews specific ideas of the Enlightenment and perceives not just humanism and discourses on human rights as universally valuable but also tracks certain religious roots of values characteristic of the Enlightenment. He sees the secular foundation of morality in the idea of impartiality — in the realisation that there is nothing magic about the pronouns "I" and "me" (they are interchangeable) that could justify privileging my interests over yours or anyone else's. "If I object to being raped, maimed, starved, or killed, I can't very well rape, maim, starve, or kill you. Impartiality underlies many attempts to construct

morality on rational grounds: Spinoza's viewpoint of eternity, Hobbes's social contract, Kant's categorical imperative, Rawls's veil of ignorance, Nagel's view from nowhere, Locke and Jefferson's self-evident truth that all people are created equal, and of course the Golden Rule and its precious-metallic variants, rediscovered in hundreds of moral traditions." (Pinker, p. 412). Pinker also very characteristically invokes the value of the American Constitution as the main result of the Enlightenment process. It is compatible with the historical view that the American state is indeed the first modern state because philosophers of the Enlightenment established it. The Constitution contains the idea of separating the three powers and numerous mechanisms of balance and mutual control of various institutions.

We must admit that Pinker's approach deserves admiration and respect because — on the one hand — he is particularly humanistic while — on the other hand — using complex statistical "big data," promoting crowdsourced research and teamwork.

One of the main points of his approach to the philosophy of humanism is that he argues that philosophers should abandon the thought that began with the pre-eminent thinker, humanist and anti-humanist at the same time, i.e., Friedrich Nietzsche; according to Pinker, he is responsible for subjectivism which can be found not only among leftist thinkers but also among populist politicians who won numerous elections in many states. The Enlightenment enables us to display impartiality comparable to rationality, as understood by Richard Rorty. It can be understood as impartiality but also as intersubjectivity.

In this context, we should emphasise that defending the Enlightenment by crossing out Nietzsche's perspectivism and extreme subjectivity is a defence of the idea of truth, which is not necessarily a static and instantaneous revelation, enlightenment, but the truth as a process of investigation and abandoning a singular point of view. Such a defence of the idea of truth is easier for a cognitivist with a humanist bent than for pure humanists who do not lean toward social researchers. It seems natural. Nevertheless, in his use of current social research (thus paying tribute to his masters in this respect), Pinker is masterful; however, the main point of his books, not just the last one, is exceptionally humanistic and socially engaged. It is this engagement that results in him being accused of Romanticism.

"It is humanism that identifies what we should try to achieve with our knowledge. It provides the ought that supplements the is. It distinguishes true progress from mere mastery." Steven Pinker. Enlightenment Now (Pinker, Kindle Locations 8361–8362).

"As for accusations of romanticism, I can reply with some confidence. I am also the author of the staunchly unromantic, anti-utopian *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, in which I argued that human beings are fitted by evolution with a number of destructive motives such as greed, lust, dominance, vengeance, and self-deception. But I believe that people are also fitted with a sense of sympathy, an ability to reflect on their predicament, and faculties to think up and share new ideas." Steven Pinker. Enlightenment Now (Pinker, Kindle Locations 946–950).

## The "better angels" metaphor and universalism

Humanist Romanticism is best evidenced by the title of Pinker's previous book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. Pinker writes about the sources of this reflection and this metaphor in his latest book. Its Polish translation does not reflect (*Zmierzch przemocy. Lepsza strona naszej natury*, 2015) the intertextual associations of the English title. However, the cover of the Polish edition presents this angel in the human head quite literally, as if identifying this angel with the human brain, reason, and thought. Sources, however, in Lincoln's speech, i.e., the American context, tell us to think about other dimensions of this metaphor. In the *Enlightenment Now*, Steven Pinker writes that "the better angels of our nature, in the words of Abraham Lincoln. Only by looking at the facts can we tell to what extent our better angels have prevailed over our inner demons at a given time and place." (Pinker, Kindle Locations 950–951).

This metaphor came from the speech inaugurating Lincoln's presidency at the time — oh, the irony! — shortly before the civil war broke out, on 4 March 1861. That was a powerful speech because it was primarily aimed at the South, to the 7 seven states that seceded as the Confederacy, one day before the Confederate attack on the federal army. In this context, it is also significant that Lincoln defended the integrity of states, guaranteed by the Constitution in his First Inaugural Address, Monday, March 4, 1861:

> I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.[2]

[2] „Abraham Lincoln: First Inaugural Address. U.S. Inaugural Addresses. 1989", Accessed 18.05.2022: https://www.bartleby.com/124/pres31.html.

This metaphor of the better side of our nature is intended to present the very universality of the Unionists (or, in this case, limited universality, but still), so it is equivalent to the thing so beautifully described by Pinker when he writes about the Enlightenment humanism; it is a golden moral principle used for the politics of the Unionists and abolitionists. American patriotism must conform to the constitutional principle of equality before the law of all American citizens. We could say that the Confederates did not listen quite well to Lincoln's voice if the civil war broke out on the next day, which — according to Lincoln's speech — was pure anarchy, incompatible with the Constitution.

In this case, we should notice that parts of the Enlightenment's humanist message are occasionally called Romanticism, by the same principle that depicts sentimentalism as pre-Romanticism. Sentimentalism should not be called pre-Romanticism because it is the most fully-developed expression of the Enlightenment. In this light, the French Revolution is only an amplification of the Enlightenment principles, like human rights and their definitions by John Lock and later by Thomas Paine constituted a foundation for the constitutional thought of the United States.

## Popular culture and metaphors of the Enlightenment

We can also find such a reaction in the so-called "contemporary popular culture". In 2018, Barbra Streisand published *Walls*, an album containing the song *Better Angels*. (Cf. Morris, 2018)

*Angry words and bitterness*
*'Cause love to fade away*
*What happened to the dreams*
*And hopes that we shared yesterday?*
*Mystic chords of memory that stir within in our soul*
*Lead us to forgiveness so that we can be made whole*

*We are not enemies, there is no good in that*
*There are better angels that surround us all*
*And we will find a way through all our differences*
*Hear the better angels, listen to their call*

*Hatred only breeds more hate and darkness in our heart*
*May we find compassion in a world so torn apart*
*A symphony of what could be*
*Says this where we start*

*We are not enemies, there is no good in that*
*There are better angels that surround us all*

*And we will find a way through all our differences*
*Hear the better angels, listen to their call*

*Let the better angels be our guide*
*Yes, there are better angels walk beside*
*Can you catch us all?*
*'Cause we just about to fall*
*Rise up and find better angels in us all*
*Yes, rise up, it's time, oh it's time*

Here is a fascinating intertextual relationship that enables us to invoke the entire context of contemporary times, with populism, the domination of lies (fake news) over truth, and erecting walls to divide ourselves. This Barbra Streisand album also contains the titular Walls, which — as an image and metaphor — evoke in us that which runs entirely contrary to the "better angels of our nature," but they also embody the very idea of particularism over universality.

*These are walls that we don't see*
*That we built between the you and me*
*Made of broken dreams and wounded feelings that go on*
*Like walls we wish to go away*
*Could we have ourselves that better day*
*If we took the chance to simply say that we forgive*
*And then we'd forget they'd be gone*

The principle of universality, "I" is equal to "you," "you" is equal to "I," ale means the equality of all citizens from the United States Constitution.

Jean Baudrillard's postmodern reflection on the Enlightenment principle of universalism is very interesting in this context.

Indeed, Baudrillard has also produced some provocative reflections on globalisation. In *The Violence of the Global*, he distinguishes between the global and the universal, linking globalisation with technology, the market, tourism, and information contrasted to identification of the universal with "human rights, liberty, culture, and democracy." (Baudrillard, p. 15) While "globalisation appears to be irreversible, … universalisation is likely to be on its way out." Elsewhere, Baudrillard writes that "the idea of freedom, a new and recent idea, is already fading from the minds and mores, and liberal globalisation is coming about in precisely the opposite form — a police-state globalisation, a total control, a terror based on 'law-and-order' measures. Deregulation ends up in a maximum of constraints and restrictions, akin to those of a fundamentalist society." (Kellner, p. 16)

We should listen to these words because today they sound like a prophecy: "globalisation appears to be irreversible," and "already, the idea of freedom … is being erased from everyday lives and conscious-

ness, and liberal globalisation". Today's form of globalisation involves police states, total control, terror based on internal resources of the police, which is intended to serve the public good. Deregulation ends in limitations like those in a fundamentalist society.

In other words, Baudrillard would probably agree here with the messages of both Michel Foucault and critics of the Frankfurt School; however, he would stand out with his explicit pessimism when it comes to the ideas of freedom and democracy, which can be identified with the Enlightenment legacy as well. According to Kellner, Baudrillard is here the ally of anti-globalisation movements that stood against neoliberal globalisation to protect the rights of individuals and democracy. Nevertheless, it is also interesting that Baudrillard's reflection paved the way with its symmetric of sorts for the populists of the 21st century.

Steven Pinker, invoking Lincoln with the title of his book, demonstrates the power of humanism within the idea of universalism. This idea can naturally have its roots in Christianity, especially the one inspired by the teachings of St. Paul (Badiou), but the Enlightenment indeed made this idea one of its primary principles.

In this respect, another critical issue is the history of the contemporary reception of the main symbol of the Enlightenment existing in the popular imagination: the Statue of Liberty, whose original title also directly references the Enlightenment: *Liberty Enlightening the World*. Of course, the word "enlightening" can be rephrased as "casting light," but this removes the etymological connection to the Enlightenment; furthermore, its French title is *La liberté éclairant le monde*. Casting aside the complex origin of this symbol, which also references American-French friendship, it is worth analysing the final chord in the long history of the Enlightenment: the dispute concerning the poem *The New Colossus*:

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,*
*With conquering limbs astride from land to land;*
*Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand*
*A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame*
*Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name*
*Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand*
*Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command*
*The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.*
*"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she*
*With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,*
*Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*
*The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*
*Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,*
*I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Lately, a change made to this poem has proved very controversial; made consciously by Kenneth Thomas Cuccinelli, a lawyer and former prosecutor, currently working as the Director of the Citizenship and Immigration Services in Donald Trump's administration. "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge." The word "charge" has multiple meanings, be it "allegation" or "accusation," which has its connotations in the context of racial biases against immigrants and their alleged criminal activities.

An essential thing in the whole affair around this intentional change of Emma Lazarus' sonnet is that it reveals a particular transformation in the concept of the United States as a state of the Enlightenment. The famous couplet from Lazarus' sonnet: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," whose original text invokes the Biblical idea of justice contained, among other places, in the Gospel of Matthew 11:28, but can also be found in the Books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The change here consists of the idea that universalism can appear as passive equality before the law, but it can also express itself as an active force introducing this equality in a deeper, not just formal, sense. Therefore, there were many discussions about this perversion of the "sacred text" on the "sacred symbol of liberty" and the United States; this controversy has been noted worldwide. It indicated a political change that transformed the legacy of the Enlightenment once more into a libertarian, extremely individualistic call to implement the American Dream by oneself without the state's assistance. No wonder that in 2018, even before the Cuccinelli scandal, the socially engaged album *Walls* included a powerful song titled *Lady Liberty*, referencing both Lazarus' poem and the popular perception of the symbol of liberty.

*Oh, Lady Liberty*
*Show us how to stand and feel a little prouder*
*As the anthem plays let's sing*
*And raise our voices even louder*
*Since the real danger lies in the sound of silence*

This simple song demonstrates that being an enlightened citizen means being an active citizen, a citizen voicing their opinion.

## Neiman, a Jew and philosopher of the Enlightenment, learns from the Germans

I would like to prepare my conclusion to my exploration of how to study the Enlightenment and defend its ideas with a brief analysis of a recent book by Susan Neiman, as mentioned earlier. She writes that

most of her recent philosophical works were devoted to the defence of the much-maligned Enlightenment, "that eighteenth-century movement which created the foundations for universal human rights." (Neiman, p. 18) Thus, even she sees universalism as the key to the teachings of the Enlightenment. On page 28, she admits not just to be inspired by the theory of John Rawls (the idea of justice and political liberalism), but also by the teachings of Hannah Arendt and Jean Améry. Neiman states that she wrote the abstract, but she wanted to be very particular, so she recorded hundreds of hours of interviews. Later, she invokes Arendt and Jean Améry, after whom the Prize for European Essay Writing was named.

Neiman is subjective and does not avoid assessing the present; she directly states that she will argue that the "2016 election resulted, in large part, from America's failure to confront its own history." (Neiman, p. 27). In other words, from its failure to go through its past, which postwar Germany did quite meticulously.

The most powerful fragment of the writings by Neiman is this:

> I do my best to follow Tzvetan Todorov's wise injunction: Germans should talk about the singularity of the Holocaust, Jews should talk about its universality. You can derive the principle from Kant, but it's also a variation on an idea we should have learned in kindergarten: if everyone cleans up her own mess, we won't have to worry about anyone else's. Todorov's claim will only be problematic for those who think statements are exhausted by their truth value. In fact, as ordinary language philosophy has taught us, statements are often forms of action. A German who talks about the singularity of the Holocaust is taking responsibility; a German who talks of its universality is denying it. Germans insisting on universality are seeking exoneration; if everyone commits mass murder one way or another, how could they help doing it too? Germans were not the only ones to compare their own racist crimes with those of others.[3](

Another interesting reflection can be found concerning Adorno:

> As the returning émigré philosopher Theodor Adorno later argued, the most important part of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* affects the unconscious. The Frankfurt School theorists emphasised the importance of psychoanalysis, and if raking through the past was going to heal anything, individually or nationally, it had to come from within. Reproaches from others are only likely to create resistance. "Whatever happens as propaganda remains ambivalent," Adorno insisted. That's just how we're built: attack us from the outside, we'll be quick to defend our ground.[4]

Neiman also mentions another researcher and translator of the Enlightenment who, due to historical necessity, transformed into a scrupulous reviewer of the

[3] Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, p. 30.
[4] Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, p. 48.

language of the Third Reich, Victor Klemperer. Like many today who are continuously inspired by Hannah Arendt, Victor Klemperer can become a great patron of research on hate speech in state propaganda. Of many contemporary states. (Klemperer, 1992)

## Conclusions

This article begins with the ascertainment that there have been many critics of the legacy of the Enlightenment lately. However, it also points out its expressive defenders. Both are often inextricably tied to each other. One of the primary assumptions of this article is that it is not possible today to narrow such reflection to the historical period of the Enlightenment. That is because its legacy is still alive, while thought and ideational trends which began in that period are still being debated; they are continuously recurring motifs in the human culture and civilisation. Thus, the Enlightenment should be studied as a "long durée" and unconsciousness of history.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most significant problems created by the Enlightenment legacy is the Holocaust. Then I briefly discuss the political reflection of Tzvetan Todorov and Michel Foucault to arrive at one of the more original defences of modernity in the work of Susan Neiman, presenting two mythical figures of modernity, prefigurated in dim and distant ancient times: Odysseus and Abraham negotiating with God.

Then, the paper also points out the main foundational idea of the Enlightenment, which is best shown by the metaphor of "better angels"; it is the idea of universalism. It demonstrates how strong a determinant it is in moral messages of the Enlightenment and contemporary popular culture. It also shows the movement from the passive idea of universalism to active universalism.

My contemplations are concluded by a reflection on the latest book of Susan Neiman, an apologist of the Enlightenment, who states that we can learn much from the Germans who, in the spirit of working on the past, popularised the Enlightenment, which is a ceaseless effort.

In a sense, this image of passive and active universalisms can correspond to the image of two individualisms: "forest" and "gardening". The gardening one is conservative and maintains very significant rights to property; the other, the forest one, is generous and open to the world.

We must think of the Enlightenment not just as a source of instrumental reason in categories of Habermas but also as a source of social care; we cultivate specific values because we would like to care about other values. The Enlightenment can stand in opposition to religion, but

it also enables specific moderate versions of religion, which we can follow, e.g., in Kant's thought. I attempted to demonstrate that mythical sources of the Enlightenment are unavoidable. We are condemned to our own experience-based, emotional nature. It does not, however, mean we agree to irrationalism. As evidenced even by a cursory reading of, e.g., Susan Neiman, the fascination of Enlightenment and its ideas is inescapably a criticism of irrationality, often very strong and currently prevailing.

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