Les LUMIÈRES en ACTION

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Le combat des Lumières

RETRANSCRIPTION

THE FACE OF THE PHILOSOPHER

Alain SANDRIER, Professor of French Literature, University of Caen

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Part 1 – An “age of philosophers” … without philosophers!

The age of Enlightenment is considered as a period of scientific development and did not fail to proclaim itself as the "age of philosophers". However, there is a paradox. In effect, if we examine the history of philosophy, particularly in France, the age of the philosophers appears curiously to have no true philosophers. Between Leibniz and Kant on the extremities, both German, who is there to uphold the tradition of the great founders of the philosophical systems?

In France, there's Rousseau, of course, for political philosophy, but we equally consider him, sometimes before everything else, and not without reason, as a great writer and particularly a hugely influential Romanticist. As for Voltaire, rarely is he considered a philosopher, even though it's he par excellence whom we regard at the time as the patriarch not only of letters but of philosophers. And what to say about Diderot whose philosophical stature is less in the spotlight, and yet he is, without a doubt of all those I've named, the one who has the most solid and developed culture in the history of philosophy.

In short, all those great thinkers we'd traditionally call philosophers, including for example Montesquieu, are most likely seen in the history of philosophy as writers. And often reciprocally, we find that our great Enlightenment writers – thinking particularly of romanticists – are too philosophical. In short, it's a philosophical age without pure philosophers, if I may put it like that, and it maybe also what's most striking and instructive. The Enlightenment is essentially a period of impure philosophy and this is where its richness lies.

Part 2 – Philosophers who reject the “systems”

In truth, philosophers in the age of Enlightenment clearly wanted to distinguish themselves from the meaning that the term assumed since Descartes, that of a thinker apt at formulating systematic generalities, aspiring to discovering the answers to big, metaphysical questions. With Locke's empiricism, whose influence spanned the century, the significance of the philosophical process claimed to be more modest and this had several consequences.

As of 1734 in his *Philosophical Letters,* Voltaire opposed Descartes, author of metaphysical novels, and the empirical and experimental processes of Locke and Newton. In fact, the main target would be what we'd call, to denigrate it, "the spirit of the system". The big abstractions led to nothing and were often a simple game of words. This hunt for abstract and purely verbal chimera is one of the obsessions of the century.

Part 3 – *The Philosopher*, a manifesto

What you must remember is that the ideal portrait of a philosopher had been drawn since the turn of the century, even if this figure didn't take full form until the second half of the century. Striking example, the famous article “Philosopher” in the *Encyclopaedia* only appeared in 1765, although its source was much older. In effect, this text, reworked by editors of the *Encyclopaedia,* relied on an essay from 1716 which we owe to Dumarsais, an important grammarian and who wrote, incidentally, for the *Encyclopaedia* before his death in 1756. He was also a liberal thinker and, at the start of the Regency, he masterfully painted the portrait of what a philosopher should be like. He insisted, like Locke has already done, on the finitude of human understanding and the modesty which, in turn, the philosopher should have on the subjects that he examines.

But he also adds a dimension which to me seems essential for understanding the Enlightenment; it is a moral and social dimension. Let's hear it in his own words, it will be more eloquent:

"The philosophical spirit is therefore a spirit of observation and of accuracy, which links everything to its true principles.

But it is not just the spirit that the philosopher cultivates; he carries his attention and his cares further. Man is not a monster who should live in the depths of the sea or the deep forest. The sole necessities of life make the business of others necessary to him, and in whatever state he may find himself in, his needs and well-being compel him to live in society. As such, reason demands that he understands, studies, and works to acquire sociable qualities. It is shocking that men are not more strongly attached to the more practical things and that they become so strongly hot and bothered on pointless speculations".

Pointless speculations are, of course, a reference to theological debates.

What is important here is the enrolment of the philosopher in sociability. The philosopher is not a thinker locked up in his ivory tower; he is a social man since he duly notes the human being is made for and by society. Only Rousseau will seriously qualify this hypothesis which makes of man a being in constant interaction, someone who thinks not only for the pure pleasure of speculating, but also because thought concerns society.

In short, the philosopher never forgets, in the 18th century, that he must be useful to his fellow citizens. It is this same purpose which favours the emergence of new disciplines of thought, in particular what we call "political economy"; a very representative discipline of this impossibility among Enlightenment philosophers and even the danger, according to them, of establishing a too rigid border between theory and practice. Also, these philosophers felt fully invested in an organised action in favour of thought freed of its most heavy shackles, so much so that philosophers would immediately establish a party. This is at least what the most conservative forces would reproach them for.

And it's true that with the *Encyclopaedia* and the accession of a new, more offensive generation, a more controversial and partisan acceptation of the term “philosopher” will impose itself. Little by little, “philosopher” will become a synonym for “encyclopaedist”, at least support for the encyclopedic clan, although this term will hasten a certain number of rejections, those of anti-philosophers naturally, but also the ostensible distance taken by Rousseau who will break away publicly from Diderot and his friends.

In short, the end of the century will be the accomplishment of a generation of philosophers who exemplify, after the encyclopedic battle, a new order whose symbol could be Condorcet, for example. But this philosopher, nearly institutional, will himself suffer rejection in favour of the unclassifiable figure Rousseau who's outside of the system. As we can see, the philosopher never stopped adapting himself.

SEDUCING AND DEBATING THROUGH THE DIALOGUE OF IDEAS

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Stéphane PUJOL, HDR French Literature lecturer, Paris Nanterre University

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Part 1 – What is a dialogue of ideas?

AS: Hello Stéphane Pujol, you're an expert in the dialogue of ideas in the 18th century, a form which imposed itself on the literary and philosophical stage of the time and which you have devoted a piece of work to. But what exactly do you call a "dialogue of ideas"? Is there a difference between this and what we're used to calling "philosophical dialogue"?

SP: Hello Alain Sandrier. First of all, we must take a look back on the long tradition of dialogue in the Antiquity. This dialogue covers two great tendencies, one being more philosophical, obviously we think of Platon or Cicéron, the other being more satirical, this is the model inaugurated by Lucien. These are the two tendencies which predated the modern ages. Dialogue, which was forgotten during the Middles Ages or reduced to scholastic “pro and contra” conversations, was reborn during the Renaissance and throughout the 17th century. It became more of a European phenomenon by way of different usages.

As such, we find pedagogic dialogues including the *Colloquies of Erasmus*, published for the first time in 1522, satirical dialogues in the manner of *Cymbalum mundi* by Bonaventure des Périers in 1538, scientific, popularised dialogues such as the *Dialogue concerning the two Chief World Systems* by Galileo, published in 1632 or the *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* by Fontenelle in 1686, but also mundane dialogues from *The Courtier* by Castiglione in 1528 to the *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* from father Bouhours in 1671, and finally philosophical dialogues, more philosophical according to La Mothe Le Vayer's sceptical model and his *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des Anciens,* published around 1630.

Generally speaking, the dialogue of ideas is the analysis of a subject of discussion between two or several speakers and perfectly illustrates the Enlightenment process as a place of critical questioning and debate.

Part 2 – A dialogue of another kind

AS: This change of title does it also mean a change in output of philosophical discourse? Does it imply a new way of doing philosophy?

SP: In effect, like Fontenelle says at the turn of the century, it's about offering another way of philosophising, less dull than the dissertations and treaties, and also less conceptual. But quite quickly, critics would appear. One reproached dialogues for their too playful allure and their taste for the precious image, judged as having little in compatibility with rational requirements. The difficulty which

rapidly imposed itself on dialogue comes down to the tension between the critical or philosophical project and the problem of the literary dramatization of ideas.

Part 3 – Dialogue as an art of conversation

AS: And this both literary and philosophical dramatization of ideas, is it not linked to the model of conversation?

SP: Absolutely. 18th-century literature and dialogue in particular cultivated the spirit of conversation. It's about saying the truth but saying it in a way which is both animated, natural and cheerful. This is the difficulty of a genre which does not have its own rules, but which refers constantly to this living model that is conversation. Generally speaking, the aesthetics of dialogue in the age of Enlightenment is not without connection to the natural problem that we already found in Platon's work. In the 18th century, conversation was also the place par excellence of exchanging and debating ideas. It pertained to the new places of sociability that were academies, salons and cafés.

Part 4 – The main characteristics of dialogue

AS: According to you, what were the main characteristics of the dialogue of ideas?

SP: The form of dialogue can sometimes be a ploy and integrate discourses of one or several voices. The support of fiction allowed it to play with the traditional framework of the discussion of ideas. The role of an inaugural description, the enrolment of dialogue in a given time and space are the non-negligible elements to understand the originality of these texts. But the essential criteria in my eyes remains the ethos of the speakers, that's to say the way in which they exemplify moral values. It's about making one's own voice heard, maintaining the tension between subjects who don't think in the same way but who must be able to feed and enrich each other's point of view. Since dialogue takes on another way of philosophising, it must summon speakers other than career philosophers.

AS: In what way?

SP : By profoundly renewing the face and status of speakers, by giving a place to marginalised voices, which from now on would take critical allure; that of a noble savage, of course, but also that of a woman or a buffoon or a madman in *Rameau's Nephew* by Diderot for example, or of the dying, with the *Dialogue between a priest and a dying man* by Sade, which appeared in 1782. The case of *D'Alembert's dream* by Diderot is equally very interesting. First, conceived on the model of antique dialogue, its profound originality meant as much to the daring of diderotian materialism as to the choices of speakers such as Diderot himself, D'Alembert, Bordeu and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; that's to say a philosopher, a geometrician, a doctor, a socialite, all who were contemporaries of dialogue writing.

Part 5 – Variety of dialogue

AS: Any there any themes or registers that owe themselves more than others to the dialogue of ideas?

SP: The dialogue of ideas takes on the majority of big themes the Enlightenment thought moulded: the dialectic of nature and culture, the place of education, the definition of happiness. It perfectly illustrates the debate which opposed philosophers and the church, deists and Christians and, within the Enlightenment itself, what opposed deists and atheist materialists. These themes and registers strictly depended on the ultimate aim desired. The 18th century particularly cultivated three types of dialogue: parodying or satirical dialogue, pedagogic or scientific dialogue and philosophic or heuristic dialogues, of which representatives were often referred to among respective figures like Voltaire, Fontenelle and Diderot.

But any strict compartmentalisation is prohibited, in the same way that we wouldn't know how to classify these writers under a particular group. If there is often a parodying and satirical use of dialogue by Voltaire, it's primarily for denouncing fanaticism, that of priests first, but also a certain philosophical sectarianism. Some of his dialogues are authentically philosophical, the *Dialogues d'Evhémère* for example. As for Diderot, he also wrote a text *The Sceptic's Walk,* billed as rather more classical than *Rameau's Nephew*.

The role of Diderot in this story is, of course, essential, even if the conversed form largely exceeds dialogue. It is an invasive form which relates to a novel like *Jacques the Fatalist* as well as the criticism of art in the *Salons*. If Diderot was able to legitimately appear as both a philosopher of dialogue and the greatest representative of dialogue, it's without doubt because he knew to give this form an unprecedented truth and authenticity. It's also because he did dialogue better than anyone else, a critical exercise which targeted philosophical practice itself.

AS: Well, thank you Stéphane for this very enlightening discussion on dialogue during the age of Enlightenment.

"ANTI-PHILOSOPHICALS"

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Olivier FERRET, Professor of French Literature, Lyon III University

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Part 1 – The establishment of a category: "Anti-philosophers"

AS: Hello Olivier Ferret, you're an expert in literary quarrels from the age of Enlightenment. Can you explain to me what an "anti-philosopher" is and the connections this category has with the one of the “philosopher”??

OF: Hello Alain Sandrier, what a big question. In the book, I try to defend the idea that “anti-philosopher” and “philosopher” function as two labels which, one like the other, attach themselves to, or is attached but only finds a semblance of unity in the struggles which oppose both groups. On the one hand, the philosophers, the Enlightenment, both well-known, while on the other hand, the anti-philosophers, defined, as their name at the time indicates, by their opposition to the first.

But unlike philosophers who struggled to agree on a unified doctrine, anti-philosophers formed a quite heterogeneous group as demonstrated by Didier Masseau in his work entitled *Les Ennemis des philosophes.* All in all, it is their enrolment in a controversial field that bestows a minimum of consistency to these ideas. I also put forward the hypothesis that on account of this logic of confrontation, we have a lesser understanding of philosophical texts, their position, sometimes even of their excesses, if we ignore the texts of anti-philosophers.

AS: Could you give us an example of these controversial simplifications?

OF: To strike an equal balance, we find two common positions in the texts of this time. Under the pen of anti-philosophers, philosophers are rebellious people who want to ruin the fabric of France under the Ancient Regime. For philosophers, anti-philosophers are reactionary idiots or fanatics. Of course, in both cases, it's about controversial representations established by opposing texts in which the aim is to discredit the adversary. On closer examination, these positions are much more complex.

Part 2 – The art of reading anti-philosophers

AS: Who was on the side of the anti-philosophers?

OF: Well, a good number of them could qualify, I'll use an anachronism. Reactionaries defended the traditional alliance of throne and altar. This meant carrying out the central role of religion, Catholic to be precise, within a political regime, a monarchy of divine right in which this religion is the religion of

the state. The philosophical clan is powerful. It benefits from support in high places like those in Louis XV's entourage, such as the queen or the dauphin. Some had support within parliament. In 1759, the indictment of assistant public prosecutor Joly de Fleury against the *Encyclopaedia* is directly inspired by texts by Abraham Chaumeix, an author among others of the *Legitimate Prejudices Against the Encyclopaedia.*

Some had support within government. That's the case of Minister Choiseul who, through political opportunism, supported Palissot, when the latter presented, in 1760, at the prestigious Comédie Française's theatre, a philosophic comedy which showed a group of philosophers on stage as dishonest people among who everyone recognised Diderot. Moreover, if Voltaire set himself against Fréron, it was because the journalist was at the head of powerful press organ, the *Année littéraire* which he rebaptised the *Âne littéraire,* whose newspapers were widely circulated and exercised a heavy influence on budding public opinion.

AS: However, they were not idiots.

OF: Certainly not, these were even astute readers of philosophical texts. Partisan as they all are, the reading of their work might also interest us, for example in order to understand what could not be said openly, but may be suggested, left to the implicit, because of the vigorous surveillance of printed editions under the Ancient Regime. Chaumeix understood perfectly how the *Encyclopaedia* worked, he updated its edginess, even if that meant exaggerating a little. The adversaries of Voltaire, Fréron mainly, understood perfectly what the issue of his plea in favour of tolerance was about. The subordination of religion under politics, which driven to the extreme, prefigured the separation of the church from the state. At any rate, it was about jeopardising the alliance of the throne and altar which I was talking about earlier.

Part 3 – Anti-philosophers in posterity

AS: But they lost the game. How do you explain that?

OF: In the eyes of literary history, the die is cast, that's true. One hardly talks of Fréron's works any more except because Voltaire assured them some celebrity by having them as a target. It's true that the struggle is unequal from a certain point of view. Responding to texts by Voltaire with his incisive style and formal inventiveness through large volumes of profound refutation was probably not the wisest strategy for reaching a wider public. The *Legitimate Prejudices* by Chaumeix, for example, has a total of 8 volumes with more than 2300 pages in total. You'll tell me that the *Encyclopaedia* has 17 volumes and 11 theatrical works, but it's a dictionary and very rarely do people do guided reading on this.

Certainly, some anti-philosophers targeted the danger of oppressiveness and the serious mind, but they are visibly uncomfortable in the production of what Voltaire called the "short and salacious". Two years after the last volume of *Legitimate Prejudices*, Chaumeix would anonymously publish, under the title *La Petite Encyclopédie,* an attack on the *Encyclopaedia* which parodied the method of attack, that being the dictionary format, with very relative humour, one has to admit.

AS: Must these texts therefore be relegated to the museum of outdated literary curiosities?

The anti-philosophers certainly lost the literary battle. It is not, however, sure that they lost the ideological battle. Their ideas continued to circulate during the 19th century, right the way up to today. In the comedy *The Philosophers*, Palissot accuses philosophers of trampling family lines under foot, of wanting to annihilate religion and even undermining the idea of nation with their cosmopolitanism. These beliefs resound strangely with what we've been hearing about over the last few years in terms of decline in supposedly patriotic identity, of questioning the principle of the separation of state and religion and the defence of the family, thus implying the Christian family.

AS: Let's say to conclude that you must know the roots of these arguments to better understand this defence philosophers fought for and the values they fought for, the values they naively believed were universal, but which they'd defend when they were attacked. Thank you very much Olivier for having reminded us of this context.

"IT PLACES" (CAFES, ACADEMIES AND SALONS)

Alain SANDRIER, Professor in French Literature, University of Caen

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Part 1 – The remits of debating ideas

Let's talk about an important aspect, ideas don't live in a vacuum. They need space to spread out as well as support. They are transmitted and circulated in a very practical way. They are the subject of learning and exchanges. All this invites us to explore places of debate in a world under surveillance, the Ancient Regime. One could not speak out in public as one intended at the time. Incidentally, one could rarely get together to exchange ideas and compare them, and even more rarely express one's opinions freely. Therefore, there were a few regulated "it places" where opinions could be made and changed.

Part 2 - Cafés

And let's start our visit at a place which, in all appearances, was the most liberal, the café. They were intimately linked with the development of yet relatively luxurious items from the New World, like chocolate and tobacco, to which we ascribe stimulating virtues for brain function. Meetings were not as constrained as in a salon where one could attend by invitation only and on a fixed date. But it was more distinguished than a hostel where one would go to be entertained. It was an excellent place for free discussion and without political stakes, in contrast to the academy.

In short, meetings here were undeniably less ritualised and ceremonious. Essentially, one discussed literature and theatre, the great cultural subjects in short. Montesquieu depicted these places in the 36th *Persian Letter*, which became the echo chamber of literary quarrels of the day. One would have to wait decades before discussions became more philosophical, and until the end of the century for politics to be discussed, since these places were under surveillance. We know that there were informers who were susceptible to repeating the liberal remarks of certain frequent visitors.

Incidentally, a story for you; we know that Nicolas Boindin, one of the more iconoclastic, liberal figures at the turn of the century, an atheist, who hardly hid it, and a great amateur of the theatre of which he was an uncompromising and feared critic, Nicolas Boindin was also an informer. Some names remained famous like the café Laurent in the 1690s or the café Gradot or again the café Procope, which still exists in Paris and which was located at the time near the Comédie Française. They were frequented by Dumarsais and Fontenelle. In his work *Rameau's Nephew,* Diderot immortalised the café Régent where one played chequers. The café was a real success. We can count more than 3000 of them in the capital at the end of the Ancient Regime.

Part 3 – Academic effervescence

Let's continue our visit. Next stop, the academies. They enjoyed a quite ambiguous and complex ideal. They essentially tried to predominate the sole merit of ideas, irregardless of rank or status, which was an often badly managed but officially upheld challenge. It was the embodiment of a republic of letters

where only ideas count. And that, manifestly, contributed to the progressive promotion of the man of letters.

But one did as if these ideas could not support any cause of opposition themselves since the academies were official institutions, which were under surveillance of those in power and which should pledge allegiance. So much so that academies were both a hothouse of free speech, because, in theory, reason single-handedly exercised its rights there, as well as places of great conformity. This contradiction will be harshly criticised at the end of the century by those with a more radical point of view in line with Rousseau.

Part 4 - Salons

The last place we're going to explore, but which may be the most symbolic of the century, is the literary salon. Salons were often, incidentally, the antechambers of academies. They are still a legacy of the previous century, with its aristocratic and precious salons, but the social dynamic of the circles was diversifying. By the bye, I deliberately use the term "circle" so as to refer to it in competition with the term "society". The word "salon" is late and retrospective. It introduces a form of mundaneness, often to denigrate its superficiality and hypocrisy. But this black vision, inherited by Rousseau, who was never at ease with society, was in competition with an idealised vision which established itself in a nostalgic light, after the Revolution, in this supposed golden age of conversation.

In fact, there's no need to side with either a black or rose vision. A salon was simply a private gathering, hosted by a woman who was in charge of kicking off the discussion. There was a wide variety. There were salons from all social standings, both aristocratic or bourgeois, and in all ideologies, whether they be favourable to Enlightenment or conservative. The principle activity was enlightened conversation, often enlivened with refined diversions. Theatre and poetry readings, but also games were common.

Let's stop off at the most well-known of them. There were lineages which were succeeded over the century starting, even before the Regency, at the court at Sceaux with the Duchess of Maine. Her salon was frequented by the marquise of Lambert and Madame du Deffand who would each manage a reputed salon until 1733 for the first and until 1780 for the latter, which had exceptional longevity. She would be in competition with a friend of D'Alembert, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, who would leave to start her own salon in the 1760s. One could also cite the example of Madame de Tencin or Madame Geoffrin, the latter being of a bourgeois background.

In all these circles, coexistence and the mix of various statuses added quality to the meetings, subtle dosage and balance between people with various interests, men of the world, men of administration, men of letters. Marivaux left famous notations in *The Life of Marianne,* which were the fruit of his frequent visits to the salons of Madame Lambert and Madame de Tencin. But behind the homage made to this type of informal school where each one taught without knowing it, there was also, according to other witnesses, an awareness of the constraints on conversation necessitating this mixing of statuses, which incited consensus more than an in-depth study of knowledge.

To conclude, whether it be in the salons, academies or cafés, in all these places, the circulation of speech was subject to compromise and certain usages, since ideas could not be developed without constraint in this very hierarchical and codified world where freedom of expression had not yet been acquired.

AGAINST ABSOLUTISM: ROUSSEAU'S *DISCOURSES*

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Colas DUFLO, Professor of French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

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Part 1 – *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*

AS: Hello Colas Duflo. It would be unthinkable not talk about Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and yet one might say that Rousseau holds an atypical place in the Enlightenment's struggle.

CD: Yes, to such an extent that we might talk about him as self-critical of the Enlightenment in the sense where he fully belongs among other enlightened thinkers; remember he read and admired Voltaire and Montesquieu, he is first a friend of Diderot and Condillac, he is an emblem of the war on anti-philosophers. In short, he is an enlightened thinker for many reasons. But on the other hand, he distances himself from other philosophers of his time and not only for personal, psychological reasons, but also for very deep philosophical reasons. This unique voice within Enlightenment discourse was heard very early on, starting with the first *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*.

AS: What is it about? Can you tell us a bit more about this discourse?

CD: In 1749, the Academy for Science and Humanities in Dijon organised an essay competition, along with a prize, with applicants responding to the question: "Has the restoration of the sciences and arts contributed to the purification of morals?"

AS: What is the meaning behind this question?

CD: Essentially, it is a commonly held view of 18th century history which comes back to us asking ourselves the question whether since breaking free from the ignorance associated with the Middle Ages, it is the restoration of the sciences and the arts, rather the progress made by science and technology that has contributed to a progression in humanity in general, but also to humanity's moral progress.

AS: And what was Rousseau's response?

CD: Well, Rousseau responds by saying that the progress made by science and technology, what we might call "progress made by Enlightenment", must be distinguished from "humanity's moral progress". His message is paradoxical. History came first, while at the same time as scientific progress was made, a degeneration in traditions occurred. One believed civilisation had progressed. One hailed sociability, civility, the famous French politeness which distinguished us from more rustic

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times but in reality, says Rousseau, "one must differentiate reality from appearances." This would be one of the prominent themes of his entire career.

What we extol as progress in art and technology was, in reality, the development of wealth and materialism, which is both a sign of inequality between men and a reinforcement of its effects. We're touching on a very important point which Rousseau did not explicitly develop in his *Discourse on the sciences and the arts*, but which he discusses in his successive discourses through the publication of a strongly worded text. I quote: "The root of unhappiness is inequality".

Part 2 – *Discourse on the Origin and the Basis of Inequality Among Men*

AS: Here we come to the famous *Discourse on the Origin and the Basis of Inequality.*

CD: In effect, in 1753, the Academy in Dijon put forward a new subject for discussion. I quote: "What is the origin of inequality among mankind, and is it justified by natural law?" That's another way of saying we're well aware that in society there are inequalities among men, there are strong and weak, rich and poor, but how do we go about explaining these inequalities? Are they of natural origin and are they legitimate? Are men naturally unequal, and natural inequality, if it exists, does it justify these social inequalities?

AS: And so, what does Rousseau say?

CD: Rousseau is rather passionate about this question. Between November 1753 and February 1754, he writes an extraordinary text which no longer takes an academic format and that is his famous *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, in which he invents a sort of reimagined history of humanity, reconstructing a hypothetical state of nature and then recounting the genesis of civil society. He does this to show, first of all, natural inequality is not the root of social inequality, as the first man, he says, was isolated, not in competition with his fellow man. Inequality only arises in a civilised society. There are only inequalities within society and therefore the source of the unequal human society we live in is private property, which is only ever a type of theft.

Of course, Rousseau acknowledges that everything is a lot more complicated than that; there wasn't a sudden change or overthrow, but rather a long history which brought about the introduction of the metalwork industry and especially agricultural practices which may have had a stabilising effect on possessions which, little by little, became private property. But something remains of this original theft in present society, the illegitimate basis of inequalities. Rousseau argues strongly that in social inequality, in the fact that there are both strong and weak, people who are extremely rich who no longer know what to do with their money while others lack the basic essentials, there is something irreducibly scandalous, which cannot be justified and therefore should not be accommodated.

AS: We sense that Rousseau has achieved posterity with this remark.

CD: It manifested itself through political policy during the French Revolution. Everyone claimed to be a follower, from Robespierre to Babeuf. But, of course, it went beyond that and much more deeply, like a reference to all the social struggles, in France and in the world, during the 19th and 20th centuries. Let's also point out, as we conclude, that Rousseau's influence was not only relative to political thought but rather in a more general way. To give one example, remember the great ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss saw in Rousseau, and his work about the destructive influence of civilisation on human beings, one of the great founding fathers of anthropology as well as modern science.

AS: Well, we'll conclude on that point about Rousseau's reflections. Thank you, Colas, for your analysis.

CD: Thank you.

AGAINST RELIGION: D'HOLBACH, *THE SYSTEM OF NATURE*

Alain SANDRIER, Professor in French Literature, University of Caen

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Introduction

Among Enlightenment's privileged targets was, of course, religion. At least, this was the feeling largely shared among public perception, whether one deplored or celebrated it. Again, it's necessary to agree on the meaning of this opposition between Enlightenment and religion. In many ways, the Enlightenment is an age neither more nor less religious than any other. It was pitted with permanent conflicts and quarrels.

But what I'd like to point out here is that the century incontestably demonstrated an audacity of thought which was a lot more conscious of itself. Lots of combining factors and several angles of attack came together to offer a varied range of convictions, from the simple critique of the clergy to radical or atheist incredulity, passing by what is suitably called "deism"; that's to say the belief in the existence of a transcendent being, a creator of the world but without this belief being based on a divine revelation.

And yet, all the great religions of Europe were founded on a revelation, whether it be Judaism, in the minority, or the different Christian confessions which still shamelessly opposed each other in Europe, even if the time of civil wars had passed. Common ground between religion and anti-religion is, without a doubt, the belief or not in the authority of a divine revelation, in other words of a text which is meant to faithfully transcribe the word of God.

Part 1 – An anonymous *System*

The most radical form of opposition to religion came about clandestinely in 1770 under a pseudonym from Holland; it was called the *System of Nature*. It's an impressive book which puts forward a sort of complete, philosophical assessment, offering a view of the world resolutely atheist and materialist. Two years later, appeared *Good Sense*, a type of résumé on the system of nature which was more incisive and accessible. The *System* was, of course, condemned straight away and symbolically burnt on the strand. It aroused anger among the clergy in France and sparked numerous replicas.

Most interesting is perhaps observing that the person who seemed to be the most unhappy with this incredulous eruption was no other than Voltaire. He will write many works to refute what seemed to him to be a dangerous descent into incredulity which appeared to be too radical, notably in political matters. As for Voltaire, one must recognise it, even if it means fighting, without rest nor weakness, the superstition and fanaticism upheld by institutionalised religions. One requires a religion for the people and the king, otherwise the people and the king could believe themselves to be superior and permit themselves to everything. Voltaire took on the role of God's lawyer.

Incidentally, his refute of the *System* in 1770 was called *Dieu, Réponse au Système de la nature*. In a way, he was annoyed at being beaten in his fight against religion by a form of incredulity which appeared to him to be socially counterproductive. And if he sees atheism as the position largely held among the Encyclopaedists, he worries about this rise in power without managing to discover who had written the work.

Part 2 – A very discrete writer: The baron d'Holbach

Its author was none other than the baron d'Holbach. A very discrete character from the republic of letters who recognised himself as only being able to have an anonymous existence. It was such a well-guarded secret that it would only be upon his death in January 1789, as the winds of the Revolution were getting ready to blow, that the revelation was made. And we'd discover that while he only passed himself off as a modest encyclopaedist, a friend of Diderot, managing a salon which he hosted, specialist in mineralogy and chemistry, he was also, in fact, an unparalleled propagandist who wrote the most violent and famous of works against religion from the 1760s onwards, including the *System of Nature*, the *Social System*, *Christianity Unveiled*, *Letters to Eugenia*, *Universal Morality* and the *Natural Policy.*.

This incredibly rich man devoted all his time and his energy to tirelessly publishing against the place of religion in society, to promote a political and social model, not democratic in modern terms, but a model which anticipated what would be the separation of state and religion in the 19th century, that's to say a country where different faiths coexisted, all peaceful and without privileges, with no place in the state machine, so that the religious sphere would be separated from political affairs.

D'Holbach drew attention over time to a whole tradition which pre-existed him and which he largely helped to circulate. Aside from his own publications, one mustn't forget his important business of translating and editing anti-religious texts, written both at home or abroad, and notably from England. For example, he translated the great English philosopher Hobbes and several essays by the Scot David Hume, who incidentally frequented his salon during his Parisian visit.

Part 3 – The atheist "system"

Going back to *System,* which had an enormous impact, one must say that its gradual establishment, which set a systematic pathway for atheist ideas, was incidentally quite an abstract work which, in the mind of the author, was not in reach of ordinary people. It reserved the atheist belief for an elite sufficiently learned to understand the interest without worrying over the social disapproval which it was the subject of. The baron started by laying the materialist foundations of his conception of nature. "Only matter exists, ideas have no real existence outside our understanding; these are only signs that our judgement uses to explore this world around us and undoubtedly whose secrets we'll never penetrate; imperfect and washed-up humans that we are".

The idea that God can only be a false abstraction since it cannot be referred to any tangible reality susceptible to being brought to light only serves the interests of people who are gripped by the prestige of this figure; this brings us back to the idea of a supreme and menacing authority. It is necessary, therefore, to free us from these frightening ghosts in order to be in a position to make sense of nature's elements which we can experiment on, notably through science. We can see how the baron d'Holbach's position was both offensive and defensive. It's about putting reason in the position of understanding what's in reach without affirming to universal understanding and even less to an idealist afterlife. This comes back to concentrating not on the salvation of another world but to the everyday happiness in the world we know.

It is, therefore, an invitation to modesty and humility in knowledge, but equally a call to daring to act within the limits set by our understanding. In that, the baron d'Holbach's radicalism is a good representative of part of the Enlightenment's legacy, that of the freedom to think and critique, of questioning beliefs and contesting them if necessary.

THE BALANCE OF POWER: MONTESQUIEU, *THE SPIRIT OF LAWS*

Alain SANDRIER, Professor of French Literature, University of Caen

Colas DUFLO, Professor of French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

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Part 1 – A life's work: *The Spirit of Laws*

AS: Hello Colas Duflo. When we think back on the legacy of the 18th century on public debates today, we often come to the famous separation of power which Montesquieu evoked in *The Spirit of Laws*. In your opinion, what was so important about this treatise in the critical state of mind of the Enlightenment?

CD: *The Spirit of Laws* really is a life's work. Montesquieu was born in 1689 at the Château de La Brède near Bordeaux. He studied law. He became a counsellor and then president of parliament in Bordeaux. He is, therefore, part of a family that is the Nobles of the Gown. In 1721, he published his *Persian Letters* and then he devoted his life to elaborating the treatise that is *The Spirit of Laws,* published in 1748, and then to defending his work until his death in 1755. So, what made this work so great? There are many possible answers as it is indeed a wide breadth of work. But one possible answer could be that the merit in Montesquieu's work is having suggested that the political sphere has a distinctive rationality.

AS: What does that mean?

CD: Montesquieu believed that human existence in society was intelligible and that it obeyed laws which can be decoded like physics or like astronomy managing to foretell the movement of the stars.

Part 2 – Discovering society's laws

AS: And yet, the laws of nature and the laws of society are not the same thing.

CD: Yes, and one might also say that this assumption contrasts with the present experience that we have of politics, since the reality behind this point of view presents us with an absurd diversity of laws and customs. Here, humans are polygamous. Now, polygamy is illegal. Here, we disapprove of materialism. Now, we encourage it through commercial transactions. Here, we have slaves. Now, we think slavery is contrary to human rights, etc. The world is diverse, arbitrary, at odds with itself, changing, absurd and we struggle to understand it.

And this is Montesquieu making a fundamental, theoretical decision about the seeming diversity of laws, customs, etc. One can like in nature, and by following the example of scholars like Newton,

decode laws, state the meaning of things, in short, tell the “spirit of laws”. By doing this, one might say that Montesquieu was the true founder of political science or sociology, even if there is always something a bit arbitrary in a founding father's research.

AS: There have, however, ever since the Antiquity, been philosophers of law, and even at the time Montesquieu was writing, what were called theorists of natural law.

CD: Yes, but Montesquieu's aim was not, contrary to philosophical tradition which, incidentally, he did not disavow, to elaborate law as it should be but understand what it is. "There is reason, he says, in diversity and variety". If people are part of a republic here and a monarchy elsewhere, one must, before asking which is better, understand why there are these differences and then ask whether the system they're in suits them or not.

One must, therefore, say how positively-diverse laws are to be explained, how they relate to a whole multitude of interacting factors like the political form, which Montesquieu called "the nature and principles of government', but also customs, climate, history, religion, etc. Here, we're not talking about what laws are, that's the work of a jurist, but what the “spirit of laws” is.

Part 3 – The separation of power

AS: But in all that, you still haven't said anything about the famous separation of power.

CD: Yes, because in reality, apart from this descriptive aim, there is a prescriptive aim in *The Spirit of Laws*. "Forms of government, it says, are divided into two big categories. On the one hand, there are moderate regimes, like the republic or the monarchy, and on the other, absolutism". Montesquieu's big question was about knowing how to avoid modern states falling into absolutism, the fatal descent into all power and, in the case of France, how to preserve the moderate monarchy from the temptation of absolutism which had been growing under Louis XIV. According to Montesquieu, this is the corrupt form of genuine monarchy. The shorter response to this question is that there must be counter powers, who share governance between themselves and compel them to communicate at all costs.

In this particular case, in the case of France, nobility, parliament, the obligation to submit to juridical forms, the privileges of each corps and even honour prohibit power from being practised in a direct and absolute manner and imposes limits which stop it from drifting towards absolutism. The concept of separating powers, which cannot be found as it is in *The Spirit of Laws*, implies that political freedom, characterising moderate states, involves powers limiting one another, and the English constitution, as described by Montesquieu, has merit since the same person or the same group of people cannot accumulate legislative, executive or judiciary powers, which, evidently, is a way of implicitly describing all that is wrong with the French absolute monarchy.

AS: Well, let's conclude on this vital legacy of the Enlightenment on our understanding of modern politics. Thank you, Colas, for this analysis.

CD: Thank you Alain.

DISSIMULATION AND SUGGESTION

Alain SANDRIER, Professor of French Literature, University of Caen

Part 1 – Digression and distance

Let's remind ourselves of an aspect which concerns the spirit of the Enlightenment and the recognisable way it's led its actions; since it was not just a questioning of power as it is often characterised, but rather a distinctive way of playing with authority to better thwart and often criticise it. The 18th century invented efficient ways of contesting given authority, which were not limited to head-on opposition but increasingly resorted to the art of allusion and suggestion. All these indirect forms of harassment towards authority would, without a doubt, become shrewder in the end and take on a deeper undermining. That's the Enlightenment's hallmark.

This holds true for conditions surrounding space for debate at the time. If digressions and allusive games were developed, it was to prohibit certain subjects from being directly addressed. The system of censorship was there to remind us that we were far from a world of free expression, that public speech should compromise with order and particular uses which one could not defy with impunity. As such, writers played with taboo to test the limits of authorities' tolerance and move the lines. One must never forget this possible core of suppression when one focuses on the Enlightenment's forms of struggle. Some are deemed experts in this game of cat and mouse with authorities, and notably writing and censorship.

Part 2 – The Voltairian art of mockery

Let's take Voltaire as an example. It's the most successful example in its capacity to thwart censorship by getting the better of it through all manner of means possible. At times, he pretended to be orthodox so as it better places criticism on another subject. For example, his tragedy *Mahomet* centres on two scenes at a time. By claiming to have support from the Pope, he tries to pass it off as an orthodox play which stigmatises religion traditionally considered as a sham.

But each of us might also interpret the criticism of any religion in its capacity to seize political power by exploiting working class naivety. In this case, Islam is only a defective mirror image of a critique which targets Christianity above anything else; Christianity officially being beyond reproach. We see him play, therefore, with degrees of insinuation in a very subtle manner, profiting from what is authorised in order to better challenge taboos. Incidentally, there is often dishonesty in this way of proceeding.

But Voltaire was never afraid of using dishonesty in his fight. He even brazenly took on the most barefaced lies for the need of the cause. As such, he was keen to pass, from the outside at least, religiously speaking, as an Orthodox Catholic although everyone accused him of the most aggressive attacks against Christianity. He unashamedly rejected the *Philosophical Dictionary* when it came out in 1764, saying loud and proud that "this work of Satan", as he liked to call it in his letters, was not by him and that someone blames him for disparaging it.

It's true that he was afraid for his security over a few weeks since he well knew that this clandestine work that he could nor would claim responsibility for, increased the number of remarks made against Christianity and will do so more and more as the reissues increased until 1769.

In this work, one can see quite well the differing degrees of criticism that one might come across at the time. There were blatant, anticlerical attacks which played on an old and shared tradition, driven by popular forms like song. We see this in the first article called “Abbot”. There were also critiques on biblical discourse which he scrutinised to better ridicule and parody it. As such, “Genesis” was presented as a parody of biblical interpretations.

But this article took the liberty of being able to look at the Bible as something no one could consider at the time; that's to say no more or less than a collection of fictive fables, like a mythology which was no more credible than unbeliever. Other articles were more complex, including a splendid piece like the first section of the “Faith” article for example.

This presented itself as a small passage, I quote: "Through a descendant of Rabelais, who is pitted against a courtesan in Rome, the Pope Alexander VI and Pic de La Mirandole discuss the Christian religion of which neither one nor the other is a believer". But Pico, before the all-mighty Pope, is obliged to equivocate and hide his lack of faith, which is a way of saying that religion is a superior form which cannot be openly criticised. The couple itself reflects the critical ways and means necessitated by a world perverted by the established lie.

And what to say about this borderline and remarkable piece in the article “Torture”, a splendid variation verging on dark humour. To better denounce this barbaric practice, Voltaire calls upon the figure of a magistrate's wife who cleverly asks: "My darling, have you not asked the question to anyone today?" When we know that this article was written after the death of the knight La Barre executed at 18 years old in 1766, who's referred to in the article itself, we see to what extent Voltaire's outrage knew, where necessary, to resort to the most audacious forms. Here, laughter turns against perversity which takes pleasure in degrading man.

Part 3 – Irony, major player

Beyond the case alone of Voltaire and the *Philosophical Dictionary,* one might say that irony was a major player of the Enlightenment. Irony sought a subtle game with the reader or listener. It installed a situation of complicity which distinguished the good and the bad interpreters without seeming to get away from what was authorised or allowed. One had to listen to the contrary of what was insisted, be capable of putting distance between the literal and direct sense for a deeper meaning to emerge.

In short, you call on the reader's intelligence in a time of coded communication. As Voltaire says in the preface of his *Dictionary:* "The most useful books are those whose readers do half the work themselves".

To conclude, let's say the Enlightenment knew how to play with this art of suggestion and dissimulation. We think of Montesquieu's critical and fetish methods, this subtle mind which has always preferred to leave his readers with the pleasure of understanding only half the meaning, a practice he already used in the novel with words from the mind of characters in the *Persian Letters,* as well as in the treaty of the famous text to slavery in *The Spirit of Laws.* His false reasoning given in favour of slavery should alert any well-adjusted person since the most flippant and incongruous justifications were being strung together here in favour of slavery.

But even still, some supporters of slavery, at the end of the Enlightenment, did not see the irony and used these reasons as if they were true justifications given by the thinker in favour of their cause.

CLANDESTINITY AND PHILOSOPHICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Alain SANDRIER, Professor of French Literature, University of Caen

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Part 1 – The discovery of manuscripts

Let's discuss a misunderstood and relatively recent aspect of Enlightenment studies. In 1912, little more than a century ago, the founding father of literary history, Gustave Lanson, wrote a fundamental article in which he reported on a major discovery. Effectively, he points out that a number of ideas and criticisms which insured the success of Enlightenment figureheads during the second half of the century, and of Voltaire in particular, already existed in the first half of the century and had as unidentifiable reference written manuscripts, that's to say written by hand. They escaped the censorship which pertained to the printed word.

Circulation methods should also be noted. Copies of these works spread very discretely, profiting from certain already established networks. These were often circles of privileged sociability, entourages of aristocratic characters like the Count of Boulainvilliers for example, for whom nonconformity of thought was also a way of demonstrating one's superiority over the common folk. But there were also intellectual circles; a lot of these manuscripts were found among the members of Parisian or provincial academies. Some academics played a significant part in the production and circulation of these manuscripts. One might think of Nicolas Fréret, for example, secretary in the very erudite Academy of Inscriptions and Humanities and author of a famous and very violent manuscript from the 1720s, the *Lettre de Thrasybule à Leucippe*.

Nowadays, these texts are held in the old vaults of libraries. The Mazarine library in particular has an impressive collection, since what is discussed in these texts, religion and its critique, cannot be cited in official debate. All the possible positions from deism to atheism, with numerous intermediary nuances, are depicted. A whole long-standing stance of opposition towards religion is gathered and held in these texts.

Part 2 – An anti-religious stance

We draw notably on the example in England where debate is more open, albeit more managed, and we're inspired by their attacks on the Catholic religion and by their stance on the delicate question of peaceful coexistence of different faiths within the same state. But we also look for long-standing critiques on the invasive character of Christianity in societal and governmental administrations. Finally, we recycle and adapt the line of argument from the previous century, dominated by what we're used to calling "learned libertines". The distinctive trait of this way of criticising religion was that it depended on a method of circulation, the manuscript, which allowed for a certain flexibility of versions in circulation.

Part 3 – The volatility of texts

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To put it another way, contrary to a printed document, which exists on the ideal of a version which is authoritative and which we can often also link back to an author, the texts we're talking about do not necessarily have fixed versions and adapt themselves ever so slightly according to the channels they borrow. One can shorten them or, on the contrary, develop them, personalise them or crop them, according to the needs of the time.

This is what makes identification of these versions so important. We're talking about a generalised use of copy and pasting and the most important text, according to its influence, for example, is not necessarily the first or last, neither the one wanted by its author, when there is one, since some texts are simply a collage of quotes whose origins are lost. Here, we find methods of network circulation which to us are very contemporary. Let's take a look at another example, without a doubt one of the most fascinating.

Part 4 – An atheist curate!

A country curate left, upon his death in 1732, a thick, autobiographical manuscript in which he admits, rather unbelievably, to having never believed in God. And he backs this up through a demonstration in what's called *Mémoire des pensées et sentiments de Jean Meslier*. The manuscript was obviously seized and confiscated by those in power, but its originality would attract the most curious of people who would have had access and who'd make often incomplete and partial copies.

In one generation, the manuscript would become a classic in the tradition of clandestine, philosophical manuscripts, whose success was almost as important as the famous *Treatise of the Three Impostors,* written in Holland at the turn of the 17th/18th centuries, which presented the three founders of the great monotheisms, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, as three men profiting from popular credibility. Coming back to the *Mémoire des pensées et sentiments de Jean Meslier,* it attracted attention for its rationalism. From a seminary background, this simple curate forged an atheist and materialist philosophy, and even communist before its time, which was based on an intransigent rationalism inherited from Descartes and a refusal of the credulity fed by Montaigne. Yet, the most surprising is seeing what distortion this unclassifiable piece of work was subjected to.

Part 5 – Meslier… Rehashed by Voltaire!

In fact, the most well-known version of the 18th century was very late and has little to link it with the original violent and dense text which spread out over nearly 1000 pages. No, it's a very reworked and shortened version, printed clandestinely in 1762, ensuring a larger circulation by relying on a tradition of distinctive manuscript circulation. Yet, the editor of this text in 1762 was no other than Voltaire, who used this cleric to serve in his own fight against the dishonourable. He wrote an introduction and used a version which only retains "the criticism of false religions", to quote the words of the *Mémoire*.

He even managed to make a deist and anti-Christian pamphlet from this atheist text in the same way he published those he wrote himself at the time. By the bye, he concluded the work with a *Prayer to God*, which owes nothing to Meslier, of course, but is a typical feature of Voltaire's work. Finally, he had great publicity thanks to the title he gave to this edition. He called it *Testament de Meslier*. This is how the most corrosive text came to be an instrument of the deist version, which was voluntarily unfaithful to the original. It was typical of changes permitted by the circulation of manuscripts.

Part 6 – Minor texts?

Of course, one might think of it as secondary literature, read by a small minority. But the study of this circulation is not as black and white as it seems. In this tradition, there are unknown illustrators and even texts whose author is unknown and will remain so, while others, as we've already spoken about, are none other than collages of quotes. But there are authors who deserve special mention. I spoke of Meslier whose harsh and ill-tempered prose is not an example of the good times.

We could say as much about other particularly brilliant authors like Fréret who I've already mentioned, or maybe Dumarsais, the grammarian writer of “Philosopher” taken from the *Encyclopaedia,* but also the author of the work entitled *Examen de la religion* which is one of the big successes of this tradition, and which was also edited by Voltaire. Finally, it's worth recognising texts by great authors and authors, incidentally, whose importance we're revaluating. Here, I'm thinking especially of Robert Challe, the author of the *Illustres françaises,* a fabulous novel from the beginning of the century. He is also the author of *Difficultés sur la religion proposées au père Malebranch,* which would only be become famous in 1768, in a shortened and distorted version by the Baron d'Holbach under the title *Militaire philosophe*. It is without a doubt one of the most passionate questionings of Christianity at the beginning of the century.

It's only in the 20th century that the paternity of this work would be discovered. It shared light on this character who until then was little known and who now constitutes a major reference in the study of the nascent Enlightenment. Let us conclude, therefore, by remarking on how the critical state of mind of the Enlightenment made use of very discrete networks and we're only just rediscovering that its authors, more or less well-known, are not so minor after all.

THE GREAT CAUSES: FROM VOLTAIRE TO JUDICIAL CASES

Alain SANDRIER, Professor of French Literature, University of Caen

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Part 1 – Archaeology of the media-friendly man

In many ways, the world of Enlightenment is worlds away from our time. We're not yet in the democratic age. Freedom of expression does not yet exist, especially in religious and political matters. There is no separation of power. However, there is something which seems to very clearly herald our media era and the possibility it gives us to advance causes, even if the press is not as widely circulated as it will be in the 19th century and barely reaches the working class.

Even if propaganda tools are not as sophisticated as they will be in the post-communication era, nonetheless, there is a way of dealing with the question of a national, even European impact. To do this, one would have to find themselves at the centre of a concise and far-reaching network. One would also have to know to relay an event by giving it a general dimension beyond the anecdote. Finally, one would have to have levers at their disposal, notably in the political world, so that debate leads to real action.

All these conditions are not easy to appropriate in the modern age but they apply themselves well in Voltaire's case. In the 1760s, he had acquired immense literary glory, albeit tainted by scandal. He had the ear of those in power, not without difficulty in France, but had more success in Berlin despite the humiliation he suffered during a stay with Frederick II. He finally settled down near Switzerland in a superb house, far from Paris and on the outskirts of the kingdom. He had nothing left to prove and the whole of Europe regarded him as the greatest living writer. However, and this is where his strength of character lies, he was far from happy with this glory. He would go on to use it to help serve the causes which would make him a celebrity and which would highlight a fundamental notion to stupefy any political reflection, and that's justice.

Part 2 – The Calas affair

The most well-known of these affairs is the Calas affair, named after a poor Protestant father unjustly accused of having killed his son, who was found dead, because he wanted to convert to Catholicism, the only official religion in France. The case took place at Toulouse in 1762. The widow and her daughter, crushed, implored Voltaire's action at Ferney. Voltaire would not be hurried. If he was moved, he also wanted to base his judgement and verify the facts. He asked for complimentary information regarding the acquaintances on the premises. Very quickly, he was convinced of a miscarriage of justice. The inquiry led only to a sentence. Here, Voltaire saw the result as a popular fanaticism passed on by local magistrates. And it was this old man of 68 who would launch himself into a long action in favour of the rehabilitation of the memory of Jean Calas.

This fight was fought through an intermediary of barristers, of a whole network of magistrates who didn't want to see the judicial institution ridiculed by a dereliction of duty. And it would begin with the official pardon in the memory of the condemned by the king's council in 1775. But the public and literary face of this official action, which sort of prepared and favoured this outcome, was a scathing

work entitled *Treatise on Tolerance,* published in 1762, which recently knew a resurgence in popularity in France with the terrorist attacks of 2015 in Paris. Let's talk about this in more detail.

Part 3 – Work in the service of a cause

It's a work of confrontation, written in urgency, which does not mean rushed. Voltaire paid particular attention to his work, he multiplied the angles of attack and the types of discourse. He presented himself in turn as a historian, jurist and hot-headed or moved witness. The work was not unified, but a succession of different discourses with variations of register and form. Here, one might find historical developments but also a famous “prayer to God” and then also a dialogue, but everything came together to highlight the value in the cause for tolerance; that's to say the call for peaceful coexistence of different religions when, for one reason or another, they find themselves in the same territory, like is the case in the South West of France, despite the official blindness of authorities.

The strength of the text lies in the collection of discourse to serve the common cause. Moreover, the circulation of Voltaire's work was impressive. This text found itself in the four corners of Europe, inciting an immense curiosity and a general wave in favour of the Calas'. It was truly one of the first judicial, media-friendly cases in the actual sense of the term. Voltaire is undeniably a man with an innate sense of communication.

Part 4 – Judicial cases and the crisis of justice

Voltaire was writing at a time where justice was discredited and was made the subject of incessant debate. It meant that the judicial system relied on the venality of sentences. Inquiry and judgement were made in secret in the chambers. In short, there was a lack of transparency in these institutions who applied the laws of the kingdom without uniformity and quite possibly with corruption. The more we advance through the century, the more justice will be criticised; and even more so with the unsuccessful attempts of radical reform, like that of chancellor Maupeou in 1770 until the death of Louis XV.

The end of the Ancient Regime was, therefore, a worrying time for justice, which would result in an increase in judicial cases, in line with Voltaire's treaty denouncing patent injustices. These texts exposed ongoing cases to risk, by attempting to circumvent the secretiveness which traditionally presided over such cases. Big-named lawyers distinguished themselves in this vein which became more and more literary in its way of expression. They were as much defence speeches as short novels about characters before fighting adversaries in a corrupt world. The real enthusiasm for these stories will be beneficial to judicial eloquence which will be brought to the fore during the Revolution.

Part 5 – Beaumarchais’ justice

The most famous example is that of a man known above all for his theatre. Beaumarchais made a name for himself, before his Spanish comedies centring on Figaro, thanks to his memoirs, notably the *Mémoires contre M. Goëzman,* about the lawyer of the financier Pâris Duverney's nephew who argued with him over the conditions of his wealthy mentor's legacy. The *Mémoires contre M. Goëzman* is the crown jewel of the genre, which knew to please the master of the discipline, Voltaire. Voltaire suggested that it should be shown in the theatre, since the picture painted by Beaumarchais of the workings of justice presents itself with theatricality, like a great satire. With his *Mémoires*,

Beaumarchais drew an audience that's hard to imagine and which contributed muchly to the discrediting of justice at the end of Louis XV's reign.

But Beaumarchais believed it couldn't be achieved otherwise. Faced with the deafness of the institution, he played, like Voltaire before him, the public against institutional powers, exposing secrecy, and like Voltaire before him, he won his cause in the end.

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CONCLUSION: MODERN DEBATES

Alain SANDRIER, Professor of French Literature, University of Caen

Part 1 – The birth of opinion

Let us hold an assessment of the Enlightenment struggle. What we can see, first of all, is a formidable intellectual and literary effervescence where the debate on ideas is not only nestled in philosophical traits, but also irrigates Romanesque production. All this is supported by the remarkable dynamism of publication. It's worth remarking that without noteworthy technical change, the production of novels strongly increased over a century and profited from the newest genres, the conquering intellectuals and was in constant evolution like the economy or history but also Romanesque writing.

The latter exemplarily succeeded through its resort to fiction and to pushing the limits of the remit of strict surveillance on the expression of ideas under the Ancient Regime. So much so that reflection conquered slowly but surely new territories. And with the development of circulation methods, and notably newspapers, emerged public opinion which was notably more and more sensitive to the evolution of society in its political dimension. The first newspaper in France was created in 1777. It was called *Le Journal de Paris* and it capped off a whole century of press development and of interest in what we called at the time " the news" and what qualified later as "current affairs".

Part 2 – Enlightenment in the plural form

This doesn't mean that Enlightenment was reduced to a simple opposition between progressives and reactionaries, between philosophers and conservatives. What's mostly remembered is a big dispersion of positions and competition among all levels, between different sensitivities, which even divided from within. It refrained from using too monolithic notions and making analysis too complex. For example, it's too easy to talk of a united religious front since there were important noteworthy differences between Jansenists and Jesuits, and that's without talking about divisions within different branches of the Jansenist movement.

But most importantly, all these religious sensitivities did not necessarily have a solid position against the most offensive of forms in the Enlightenment struggle. They ended up developing themselves by taking account of new methods of circulating ideas. Next to the great novels which literary history has preserved, there's a whole Christian production of enlightening novels which demonstrated a real philosophical acculturation. The novel, which was seen as dangerous, is now recognised as a useful weapon in well-intentioned hands.

What's more, texts written by apologists resorted to fashionable formats and genres. We no longer count the dictionaries in favour of religion which take the opposite stance of the most symbolic dictionaries of the critical state of mind of the Enlightenment. For example, a thinker like the Abbot Bergier, who responded to Rousseau, Voltaire, and d'Holbach appeared, at the end of the century, as a true thinker wanting to beat philosophers at their own game. Incidentally, he attracted the attention of everybody, including philosophical adversaries, for his integrity in the debate. And despite a more sensitive anti-philosophical line at the end of the Ancient Regime, he participated in the new enterprise of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* to the point of appearing, within its hierarchy, as a more or less orthodox theologian.

Similarly, philosophers did not follow a uniformed strategy and rivals accepted responsibility for making progress during the century. It was, incidentally, one of Voltaire's refrains which deplored the lack of unity within the philosophical movement. In his own words, he wished for "unity among brothers".

This is one of the reasons for his aggressivity towards Rousseau, who ostensibly broke with the philosophers with his *Letter to M. D'Alembert on Spectacles* in 1757. But Rousseau was unclassifiable. Voltaire was equally worried about the rise in influence of atheists like d'Holbach. One might similarly say that there was hardly any unity in the political philosophy of the Enlightenment, despite a united opposition to absolutism, a word made fashionable thanks to Montesquieu.

But according to Montesquieu, the balance of power had nothing to do with egalitarianism and the idea of “social contract” according to Rousseau. These ideological notions would not cease to split with the advancement of the century and would clash under the Revolution.

Conclusion – The spirit of the Enlightenment

To conclude, this variety of positions makes an assessment on the Enlightenment more complex than what posterity retained by reading about its legacy at the dawn of the Enlightenment, whether it be delighted about it or lament it. The Enlightenment was filled, before anything else, with tensions, which were not all resolved. In France, it is both a period which marked the end of Catholic counter-reform and a ferocious anti-religious critique, meaning we have a very different outlook according to the point of view we adopt. This is where ideological tension which continued to shape the historiography of the Enlightenment comes from.

The most prominent example is slavery. The 18th century in Europe and singularly in France was both a period of economic development founded on the treaty of black slaves and a moment of intense critique of human trafficking. The two positions coexisted and battled, clouding a unilaterally favourable or unfavourable study of the Enlightenment. A wish for emancipation competes with the notion of man still largely marked by the idea of inequality.

The Enlightenment's legacy is not unequivocal nor limited to partisan slogans. If there's a legacy to be had, it's before anything else that of debate, change; that's to say the willingness to submit to critical opinion and reasonable or rational critique, at any rate, which does not abdicate this freedom of thought which is like a standard and an ideal of the time. It would be futile to say that it was never achieved.

DIDEROT PASSES COMMENT ON VERNET

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Reading by CD and FM:

1763 exhibition.

“How I'd like to resurrect the Greek painters and alike, as much as those from Ancient Rome and New Rome and hear what they’d have to say about Vernet's work. It is nearly impossible just to talk about them, you have to see them. What immense variety of scenes and figures, what waters, what skies, what truth, what magic, what effect. If he lights a fire, it's at the point where its glare should seem to extinguish the rest of the composition. The smoke is thick, clears little by little and is lost high up in the atmosphere. If he projects objects onto the rocks, he knows how to to tinge it to its greatest intensity without making it lose its natural colour or clarity. If he turns the light out, he knows how to to penetrate it, see it dance, flicker at the surface. If he sends men into action, you see them act. If he puts clouds in the sky, as if they were lightly suspended there, they'd travel at the wind’s discretion.

What distance between them and the sky. If he raises a fog, the light weakens and in turn vapour is tinged and coloured. The light becomes dark and vapour becomes luminous. If he gathers a storm, you hear the wind howl and the tide wail. You hear it smashing against the rocks and whitening them with their froth. The sailors cry, the sides of vessel cave in, some fall into the water, others, on the point of dying, are spread out on the shoreline.

Over here, observers raise their hands to the sky. Over there, a mother holds her son against her breast. Others put themselves in danger to save their friends or family. A husband holds his unconscious wife in his arms. A woman cries over her drowned child. The wind makes her clothes cling to her body and reveal her curves. Merchandise floats on the surface of the water and passengers are dragged off to the edge of the abyss.

It's Vernet who knows how to gather a storm, open the skies' torrent and flood the earth. It's he who also knows, when it pleased him, to dispel the storm and restore calm to the seas and serenity to the skies. Then nature, emerging from the chaos, lights everything up in a delightful way and recovers all its charm. His days are so serene, his nights so peaceful, his waters so clear.

It's he who created the silence, coolness and shadow of the forests. It's he who dared, without fear, to put the sun or moon in his skies. He stole a secret from nature. Whatever nature produces, he can imitate it. As if his compositions could never surprise us? He embraces infinite space. It's the expanse of sky under the highest point of the horizon, it's the surface of the sea, it's a multitude of men content with society. These are immense structures which he stretches as far as the eye can see.”

1763 exhibition.

“The painting which is called *"Clair de lune"* is a work of art. Both night and day are everywhere. Over here, it is the star of night which both brightens and adds colour. Over there, there are burning fires. Elsewhere, these two lights are mixed. Vernet has interpreted Milton's visible and palpable darkness in colour. I won't speak to you of the manner in which he dances and plays with this ray of light on the flickering surface of the water. It is an effect which has astounded everybody.”

1765 exhibition.

“Go to the countryside, turn your gaze to the heavenly canopy, observe phenomena for a little while and you'll swear that someone has cut a piece of the large, luminous canvas lit by the sun and put it on the artist's easel. Or close your hand and made a circle allowing you to see only a limited space of

the canvas, and you'll swear it's a painting by Vernet which he made on his easel and put into the sky. Out of all our painters, this one is the most imaginative. I've come to expect no less.

It is impossible to convey his compositions. You must see them. His nights are as moving as his days are beautiful. His ports are as pretty as parts of his imagination are striking. Equally marvellous, namely how his captive brush complies with the given situation, how his laid-back muse is free and left to herself. Incomprehensible, how he uses the star of day or night, natural or artificial light, to brighten his paintings. Always harmonious, vigorous and wise, such are the great poets, these rare men in whom judgement balances so perfectly with panache that they are never exaggerated or cold.

His fabrics, his structures, the clothes, the actions, the men, the animals, everything is real. Up close, they strike you. From a distance, they strike you even more.

Chardin and my friend Vernet are two great magicians. One might say Vernet starts by creating the country and that he has men, women and children in reserve, populating his canvas like one would populate a colony. Then he introduces time, sky, seasons, happiness, unhappiness, whatever pleases him.

It is Lucien's Jupiter who, tired of hearing the lamentable cries of man, gets up from the table and says: "Get a move on hail", and we soon see pared-down trees, devastated harvests and scattered straw from huts. Plague in Asia and we see front doors shut, deserted roads and fleeing humans. A volcano and the earth burn under feet, buildings fall, animals take fright and towns people flee for the countryside. A war here and nations take up arms and butcher each other. In this place, scarcity and an old labourer dies of hunger on his doorstep. Jupiter calls this ruling the world, but he is wrong. Vernet calls this creating art and he's right.”

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