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Enlightenment: Defining the Goals of Modernity

Dashdamir Mahmandarov*

Abstract. Modernity is seen as a historical process that started with the Renaissance and took shape with the French Revolution. Modernity, which passed through historical turning points such as Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment, gained its own character in these periods. In this study, the Enlightenment period and its ideas, which are accepted as one of the most important periods of modernity and the modern world, are discussed. During the Enlightenment period, it was emphasized that the human mind should be purified from traditions and other old-fashioned features. It is no coincidence that one of the first concepts that comes to mind when modernity is mentioned is the rational mind. The fact that reason is the central and determining element and character of modern human life, modern institutions and society is related to the Enlightenment period. In this article, the Age of Enlightenment is discussed within the framework of its basic characteristics, the features it brought to modernity and its relationship with religion. In the article, the foregrounding of reason and the spread of rationalization to all areas of modernity are evaluated as an achievement of the Enlightenment period. This study, which was carried out with the literature review method of the qualitative research method, one of the research methods of social sciences, evaluated the Enlightenment as a turning point in which the goals of modernity were determined.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Reason, Modernity, Religion

* Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology,
Teacher of the Theology Institute of Azerbaijan; Baku, Azerbaijan
E-mail: dasdemirmehmandarov@ait.edu.az
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9604-4766>


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Просветление: Определение Целей Современности

Дашдамир Махмандаров*

Абстракт. Современность рассматривается как исторический процесс, начавшийся с эпохи Возрождения и оформившийся после Французской революции. Современность, прошедшая через такие переломные исторические моменты, как Ренессанс, Реформация и Просвещение, приобрела в эти периоды свой собственный характер. В данном исследовании рассматривается период Просвещения и его идеи, которые считаются одним из важнейших периодов современности и современного мира. В эпоху Просвещения подчеркивалось, что человеческий разум должен быть очищен от традиций и других старомодных черт. Не случайно одним из первых понятий, которое приходит на ум при упоминании современности, является рациональный разум. Тот факт, что разум является центральным и определяющим элементом и характером жизни современного человека, современных институтов и общества, связан с эпохой Просвещения. В этой статье эпоха Просвещения рассматривается в рамках ее основных характеристик, особенностей, которые она привнесла в современность, и ее отношений с религией. В качестве достижения эпохи Просвещения в статье оценивается выдвижение на первый план разума и распространение рационализации на все сферы современности. В данном исследовании, проведенном с помощью обзора литературы методом качественного исследования, одного из исследовательских методов социальных наук, Просвещение оценивается как поворотный пункт, в котором были определены цели современности.

Ключевые слова: Просвещение, разум, современность, религия

* Доктор философии по социологии,
Преподаватель Азербайджанского Института Теологии; Баку, Азербайджан
E-mail: dasdemirmehmandarov@ait.edu.az
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9604-4766>

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Aydınlanma: Modernliyin Hədəflərinin Müəyyənləşdirilməsi

Daşdəmir Mahmandarov*

Abstrakt. Modernlik İntibah dövrü ilə başlayan tarixi bir proses olaraq görülür və onun ümumi konturları Fransız İnkılabı ilə formalaşır. İntibah, Reform və Aydınlanma kimi tarixi dönüş nöqtələrindən keçərək, modernlik bu dövrlərdə özünəməxsus xarakter almışdır. Bu araşdırmada modernliyin və modern dünyanın ən mühüm dövrlərindən biri sayılan Aydınlanma dövrü və onun ideyalarından bəhs edilir. Aydınlanma dövründə insan aqlının ənənə və digər köhnə rejimə aid xüsusiyyətlərdən arınması və saflaşması gərəkdii vurğulanırdı. Modernlik deyildiyində ilk aqla gələn məfhumlardan birinin də rasionel ağıl olması təsadüf deyildir. Ağıl modern insan həyatının, modern qurumların və cəmiyyətin mərkəzi və təyinedici ünsürü və xarakteri olması da məhz Aydınlanma dövrü ilə əlaqəlidir. Məqalədə Aydınlanma dövrü təməl xarakteristikası, modernliyə qazandırdığı özəlliklər və dinlə olan münasibətləri fonunda ələ alınmışdır. Məqalədə ağılın ön plana çəkilməsi və rasionallaşmanın modernliyin bütün yönünə sirayət etməsi faktı Aydınlanma dövrünün qazancı olaraq qiymətləndirilir. Sosial elmlərin tədqiqat metodlarından biri olan keyfiyyət tədqiqat metodunun ədəbiyyat araşdırması üsulu ilə həyata keçirilən bu araşdırma Aydınlanmanı modernliyin hədəflərinin müəyyən olunduğu bir dönüş nöqtəsi kimi qiymətləndirmişdir.

Açar sözlər: Aydınlanma, Ağıl, Modernlik, Din

* Sosiologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru,
Azərbaycan İlahiyyat İnstitutunun Müəllimi; Bakı, Azərbaycan
E-mail: dasdemirmehmandarov@ait.edu.az
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9604-4766>

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1. Introduction

The first thought that comes to mind when modernity and enlightenment are mentioned is the mind. This is because the central tenet of Enlightenment has been to liberate the mind from its constraints, with the goal of freeing human thought. One of the achievements of Enlightenment is that reason, specifically rational reason, is brought to the fore in the modern world. Consequently, the world is defined in a way aligned with reason.

Humans have long been regarded as rational beings. When it came to the Enlightenment, the claim that reason had previously been dominated by tradition, religion, superstition etc. rapidly gained strength. Modernity, which emerged as a process after the scholastic period and was propelled by the Renaissance, set out to emancipate the mind and achieve the goal of intellectual freedom of the Enlightenment.

Enlightenment, as will be emphasised later, is, in Kant's definition, represents the emergence of man from the darkness into which he had fallen by using his reason. The fact that Enlightenment philosophers attributed much importance to reason also determined the course of modernity in this direction. All institutions and thoughts that were seen as against reason were excluded and reason was attempted to be purified.

2. Enlightenment, Modernity and Reason

When it comes to modernity, it is unsurprising that the period that first comes to mind and is considered to be the most influential period in its formation is the Enlightenment. Because what happened in this period and certain characteristics of the period gave modernity its core traits by which it would be identified with. Beginning with the Renaissance, when humanity began to occupy a central position, reason was also an critical criterion. The most prominent feature of the Enlightenment is that it emphasised reason and accepted reason as the basis of human action, social and cultural formation, knowledge and art. From this period onwards, reason became the guiding and determining factor in these domains and individuals were compelled to come to terms with this criterion.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, radical changes and great breakthroughs in scientific thought took place in Europe. The main feature of the Enlightenment thought is that it made the functioning of the mind unique. By originalising the functioning of the mind, it brings the individual to the forefront and enables man to take his destiny into his own hands. The thought of this period argued that the secrets of the universe could be solved by reason, and that the knowledge thus acquired would liberate people and lead them to happiness. The scientific developments and intellectual movements of thought of the

Enlightenment altered the concepts of God, reason, science, nature, and humanity, and redefined their interrelationships [Hanratty, 2002; 9].

As previously noted, modernity changes and displaces the tradition. Since the Enlightenment was one of the most fundamental points of modernity, it both applied the requirements of modernity and shaped modernity with the characteristics of its own period. The answer of Kant, one of the greatest Enlightenment thinkers, who tried to find an answer to this vital question by asking ‘What is Enlightenment?’ was as follows: ‘Enlightenment is the transition from the state of human immaturity to the state of maturity.’ According to Kant, the use of critical reason independent of authority and institutionalised traditions is the basic principle of Enlightenment. Kant insists that intellectuals should use the privilege of critical reasoning on religious and political issues in order to elevate Enlightenment or humanity to a higher state [Hanratty, 2002; 17]. Since Enlightenment is a privileged position that humanity has reached and is considered as the liberation of human beings from traditional authorities and all kinds of oppression, the preservation of its continuity will also take its place as a duty within the job description of intellectuals, intellectuals and later the state to be formed in line with these principles.

The aim of the Enlightenment philosophy, which follows in the footsteps of the Renaissance and the Reformation, is to free people from all political, cultural and traditional constraints that have kept them under domination. The dismantling of these long-standing judgements and have had a powerful influence on social life, is one of the primary goals of Enlightenment thought. This idea is to oppose all judgements and superstitions against reason, nature and human happiness [Atabay, 2004; 15]. The main characteristic of all these judgements that Enlightenment wanted to dismantle was to cover and conceal the basic elements that would ensure human happiness. According to this view, true happiness can only be achieved through pure reason, scientific or sophistry-free knowledge about nature and the ability to live as a free individual. Therefore, reason, knowledge and individual are considered the dominant concepts of Enlightenment [Atabay, 2004; 17].

Enlightenment is regarded as the most significant point in the formation of modernity and its key paradigmatic features. Although the Renaissance and the Reformation also had an contributed to this process, the greatest share of contribution still falls to the Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment is also considered as the period in which the philosophical and intellectual foundations of modernity were laid. Enlightenment, which is identified with basic characteristics such as religious tolerance, human rights, self-sufficiency of human beings, acting in accordance with one's own mind while living one's

life and critical thinking method, can be defined as ‘a common mood and attitude towards the world, which is a deep scepticism towards the prevailing coloured traditional authority system and orthodoxy (especially religion) and a strong belief in the day of human reason and mind in achieving unlimited achievements in sciences and techniques that will lead to the betterment of mankind’ [Erdoğan, 2006; 16].

The primary characteristics of the Enlightenment period thought are reason and science against religion and superstition, tolerance against prejudice, justice against abuse of power and social contract instead of absolutism [Headric, 2002; 19]. With all these changes, the Enlightenment thought aimed to create a new kind of human being, whose the most decisive attribute was possession of public virtues that grounded in individual virtues. The human being emerged as a new human being as the head and basic criterion of everything. With this movement and the emergence of a new human being, the pursuit of the common good and patriotism were at the heart of public life and politics [Erdoğan, 2006; 17].

This new human being was at the centre of all fields of activity, from the forms of daily life and political life to public relations, from scientific activities to art forms. This human being, who made decisions based on their reasoning and judgment, this individual represented a break from earlier periods.. The aim of the Enlightenment movement, which brought the human being to the forefront, was to liberate people from the old order, in which myth, prejudice and superstition (i.e. the existing religion, which is accepted to have produced, ritualised and institutionalised these), which were believed to be essentially bad and enslaving according to this characteristic, were the dominant factors, and to bring them into the new order of reason, which was accepted without hesitation to be fundamentally good and liberating [Çiğdem, 2017; 15-16]. Ahmet Çiğdem articulates the fluidity of Enlightenment as follows: ‘*Therefore, any philosophical and social project must rely on reason and the principles embodied in reason or reason. For this reason, Enlightenment is also referred to as the Age of Reason.*’ [Çiğdem, 2017; 16]

The Enlightenment has been analysed in various ways, and radical and diverse opinions have been expressed regarding its origins and effects in the historical process. However, the central point of most interpretations is that it played an active role in the formation of the consciousness of modernity and that it must be considered and understood as one of the turning points that played an undeniable role in the philosophical and ontological self-understanding of the modern world and played a share in the formalisation of the modern world [Çiğdem, 2017; 19].

The modern world signified an order in which criticism and reason were at the forefront by getting rid of all totalitarian structures, dogmatic thoughts and ways of thinking. This was achieved with the Enlightenment thought. The aim of the Enlightenment philosophy was to dismantle prejudices. The destruction of baseless beliefs, mystical thoughts and religious structures, the mentality of making explanations based on areas other than reason to understand the world, nature and human beings constituted these prejudices. The Enlightenment took over the mission of destroying these prejudices from the Renaissance and Reform movements and further developed and implemented it [Atabay, 2004; 15-16]. The ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers were formed on the ground prepared by these developments before the Enlightenment, and combined with other developments in society, they realised the Enlightenment, which would form the order of the eighteenth century and the modern world.

Koselleck considers the century of Enlightenment as ‘the century of the emergence of the bourgeois society, which claimed intellectual rights over the whole world and at the same time denied the past and saw itself as the new world. The bourgeois society that emerged in the West developed the Enlightenment philosophy as a progressive philosophy. The subject of this philosophy was the whole of humanity, united from its European centre and peacefully oriented towards a better future.’ [Koselleck, 2012; 14]

When discussing the nature of Enlightenment thought or the modern world, particularly in relation to the West, several key characteristics are widely acknowledged: the exclusion of dogmatism from thought and society, the glorification of rationalism, the intense emphasis on human happiness, the weakening of religious power, and the negation of authoritarian structures. Çiğdem, interpreting Dilthey's concepts, states that the themes that determine the lines of Enlightenment are ‘the autonomy of reason, the solidarity of intellectual culture, faith in the inevitability of the progress of reason and the aristocracy of the spirit’ [Çiğdem, 2017; 17]. Moses Mendelssohn said that the Enlightenment was an unfinished process of education in the use of human reason and at the same time open to all [Outram, 2007; 17]. There is almost unanimity on the view that reason is the most fundamental feature of the Enlightenment. Reason and its use have a universal characteristic as a common feature of humanity. For this reason, Enlightenment philosophers emphasised the universality of their ideals. This would later become entrenched in the political dimension of Enlightenment thought.

The idea of progress has taken its place in Enlightenment thought as one of the basic building blocks of modern philosophy and political thought. When considered in this context, history is also something that progresses in a straight line. Enlightenment also marks the period in which the anthropological

and aesthetic understanding of man and the world view were politicised and politicised and accumulated [Çiğdem, 2017; 19-20].

The medieval understanding of the divine state dominated all individual and social life. Humanism, Renaissance and Reformation are the movements of Europeans to get rid of this oppression. The succession of these movements brought about the emergence of individual consciousness and cultural and social/political transformations. As a result of these movements, individuals gained the freedom to use their minds and choose the sect they wanted. At the same time, these movements brought about a radical change in the understanding of the individual, the state and the law. Enlightenment is a literary and philosophical movement that emerged on this ground and confronted superstition, ignorance, traditional/cultural knowledge and dogmatic wisdom [Atabay, 2004; 16]. Peter Gay argues that these basic characteristics may have existed in pre-Enlightenment periods, but these ideas gained their 'revolutionary' dimensions with the Enlightenment [Çiğdem, 2017; 21-22].

In the eighteenth century, although ambitious/mystical words were seen, they were no longer popular in high intellectual society. Although theologians maintained this attitude, they increasingly felt obliged to give rational explanations for their views and actions [Becker, 1961; 48]. Humanism, Renaissance and Reform movements started in Europe to weaken the dominance of religion/church and to destroy its monopoly in all social, cultural and political fields. The aim was not to abolish religion entirely, but to change the destructive power of religion under the representation of the Church. The movements made for centuries in the direction of this goal brought the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment thought condemned religion by accepting reason as the precondition of human happiness. Tanilli quotes a comment of Engels on this subject; 'religion, the understanding of nature, society, state organisation, everything became the subject of the most ruthless criticism; everything had to defend itself before the court of reason or was condemned.' [Tanilli, 1989; 43]

3. Enlightenment and Religion

The effects of the Enlightenment on religion are known to have brought about radical changes in religious thought and in people's religious beliefs and understandings. Today, the view that modernity and the Enlightenment changed the way of religious belief and even eliminated it from the life of society is more and more dominant. Despite the dominance of this view, the effects of religion on the Enlightenment, the view that the Enlightenment was a religious movement and the rise of modern paganism are also effective as different ways of reading. Hegel argues that the Enlightenment, especially the

Lutheran Reformation in France, was a religious movement practised in a different way. Both Luther's Reformation and the Enlightenment essentially aimed at human freedom. In other words, according to Hegel, Enlightenment is a religious movement aiming at the freedom of the spirit [Outram, 2007; 138].

Peter Gay, while defining the period, says that Christianity was no longer the Christianity of the Renaissance and the secularism of the Enlightenment had not yet crystallised [Gay, 1966; 314]. Gay also notes the common view that the Enlightenment began with the English Revolution and ended with the French Revolution. Important dates such as the birth of Montesquieu and the death of Holbach accompany these two revolutions. But these boundaries are not absolute. The Enlightenment is regarded as the last movement of the Renaissance, with repetitions and the insertion of Bayle and even Descartes among the philosophies. Gay argues that the characteristic features of the Enlightenment can be found in earlier periods, but that it gained its revolutionary power in the eighteenth century. He says that Hobbes and even Bayle lived and wrote in a completely different world from that of Holbach and Hume [Gay, 1966; 17].

This shows both that the Enlightenment was a continuation of the movements that preceded it, and that in the eighteenth century it acquired its own character and features. Religion has gained a new dimension and feels the necessity to express itself in a rational way, and the Enlightenment has not yet been fully secularised. In such an environment, the existence of mutual interaction cannot be denied. Both philosophers and clergymen follow the existence and reality of the Enlightenment and modern developments at the same time, following the phenomena and keeping up with them. Gay reports that an archbishop was concerned about the harmful effects of Hume's writings on the 'most enlightened' modern Christians like himself [Gay, 1966; 22].

The Enlightenment thought, which found political ground with the French Revolution, found the opportunity to apply its attitude towards religion in a more radical way. Even though the effects of religion on the Enlightenment were discussed and recognised, after the Revolution, religion completely lost its sovereignty. The most important social fact of the eighteenth century was the invasion of modern theology by rationalism [Gay, 1966; 22].

Diderot characteristically described the eighteenth century as a time of philosophers and 'enemies of philosophy'. Both groups formed coalitions and had influential relationships with their enemies. The philosophies themselves differed in religious thought and political preferences, and the battle between materialists and utilitarians never ended. However, Anglicans, Lutherans, Catholics were at enmity with each other. Thus, once upon a time,

philosophers were more friendly with Christians than with each other, who were tied to their own culture in terms of upbringing [Gay, 1966; 23-24].

These comments, which show that religion was not completely eradicated during the Enlightenment period, also show that Enlightenment thinkers did not have a common view on religion. This was a factor that divided 'les philosophes' rather than uniting them [Çiğdem, 2017; 42], showing that there was no decline in religious interests during the Enlightenment and that the age was still a religious age [Çiğdem, 2017; 56]. In this context, Barnett quotes Kors as follows; 'above all, the questioning and debates that formed the components of atheistic thought were formed within the deeply Christian established culture of those years (late 17th and 18th century). [Barnett, 2017; 76]

It is very striking as a point emphasised in post-modern criticisms. Enlightenment period thinkers also drew attention to this point. However, in the criticisms of modernity made through the institutions created for social, political, cultural and educational purposes, it is claimed that these institutions are not the invention of modernity itself, but that modernity took them from the Middle Ages and transformed them into a new instrument of domination with a secular framework and goal.

Although the Enlightenment could not destroy religion, religious thought and the urge to believe in people, it is certain that it created radical changes in the religious understanding, in the social and political, and even in the relations of individuals with religion and the metaphysical. Although the Enlightenment was not a rupture in the human process, it was a turning point and led to the formation of the modern world. In analysing the nature of modernity, it has already been stated that social and historical phenomena cannot be separated from each other. Enlightenment is a turning point between the Middle Ages and the modern period, and it has influenced the events, perceptions and perceptions before and after it.

4. Conclusion

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning or end of the period known as the modern world, as it does not seem possible to draw definitive boundaries between historical periods. However, it is widely claimed that modernity started with the Renaissance. Modernity has passed through many periods in its development process. One of the most important of these is Enlightenment.

Enlightenment is the period in which reason known as the most fundamental characteristic of the modern world, is treated as the dominant element. Reason was regarded as the main guide of human beings and societies, political and daily life. Reason had to be purified from all obstacles and restrictions. This mission is one of the most important goals of the Enlightenment.

Enlightenment philosophy shaped the modern world by making rational reason the central element of human life and behaviour. During this period, society, human life, politics and religion had to be formed and guided on the basis of rational reason. The Enlightenment philosophy was developing in the direction of removing religion from human life and replacing religion with reason. Therefore, as a result of the spread of rational reason, religion would be removed from social life and human life would be shaped based on rational reason. This goal was not only philosophically conceived but also seen as one of the political goals of the Enlightenment. Therefore, today virtually all people tend to rationally justify their behaviour and, in some cases, even their beliefs.

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