

Animal-human-machine. Immediate context of “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?”

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Abstract. The guiding principles of enlightenment thinking – tolerance and renunciation of the prejudice of authority – are followed to demonstrate the possibility of interpretation, using all texts as equivalent and avoiding the one-dimensional representations of the Enlightenment. The aim is to give a description of the immediate texts and contexts around Kant’s “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” in 1784: the fable “The Monkey” by Zöllner and the anonymous letter on Kempelen’s chess and speech machines with Biester’s comment. According to the hermeneutic-metaphysical approach “to understand the author better than he understood himself”, the article demonstrates that they are not only specimens of the most popular genres of the Enlightenment (fable, answering, letter) but also examples of the ethical issues surrounding the understanding of the relationship animal-human-machine, theory-practice, public-private, useful-harmful. The textual material is subjected to a contextual and universal examination, whereby the more general relationship between hypertheses and hypotheses is considered. Kant’s articles in the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” after his involvement in this dispute show the rethinking of the Copernican turn and demonstrate the transition from an individualistic to a public-oriented, yet not radical, position. The answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” turns out to be not only factually but also ideologically important in the transition from the first to the second version of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Keywords: Enlightenment, genres, contextual, universal, hyperthesis

1 “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” or for the enlightened consciousness

In January 1783, Friedrich Gedike and Johann Biester began publishing the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*”, a magazine in two volumes of six issues per year. According to them, this is “another of the wonderful, good, medium and weak periodicals, which, however, is modest enough to know its shortcomings and distance from its ideals” (Gedicke & Biester, 1783,

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p. 1). Modesty is exaggerated: thanks to the long-term work of publishers, authors and readers, the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” became the most influential printed periodical of the late Enlightenment in Germany. A wide range of authors gathered round the magazine, each of whom participated in several organizations with a stated educational purpose: German and European academies of sciences and arts, state secretaries and public councils, high schools and universities, publishing houses, galleries and theatres, religious and secular associations for the distribution of books and knowledge, church boards and Masonic lodges.

Until its last issue in 1811, when it is called “*Neue Berlinische Monatsschrift*”, the magazine pursues the goals set by Christian Thomasius in 1688 with the unique title of its prototype, which outlines and describes the German Enlightenment: “Sincere, Cheerful and Serious, Mostly Sensible and Legitimate Thoughts or Monthly Talks about All Sorts of Things, but Mostly about New Books” (cf. Thomasius, 1690; tr. D.D.). In keeping with this programmatic title, the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” strives to offer “supreme diversity, pleasant teaching and useful entertainment” (Gedicke & Biester, 1783, p. 1; tr. D.D.) in the headings promised in the preface to the first issue: “1) News from the whole realm of science, mainly regarding new discoveries that deserve both general attention and the interest of connoisseurs; 2) Descriptions of peoples, their customs and devices, especially of those closest to us; 3) Observations of everything that affects man, and further everything that would contribute to self-knowledge and the knowledge of our brethren; 4) Biographical information about remarkable people, mostly unknown so far for their merits; 5) Contributions to the development and knowledge of the German language and literature in earlier and more recent times; 6) Translations of important, still neglected, masterpieces from antiquity; 7) Excerpts from rare but remarkable works from abroad; 8) Works of different types and with different content, which are in harmony with our plans” (*ibid.*, pp. 1-2; tr. D.D.).

The rubrics also provide a comprehensive answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” They outline the field of the most accurate concept of Enlightenment: a *reasonable combination* of curiosity with interest and benefit; *innovative translation* and translation of past and present models; *critical attitude* towards oneself and others; *methodical use* of the conceptual expression; pleasantness in acquiring various knowledge and abilities; *useful education* with influential examples and model biographies. In short, enlightenment in its core serves to explain, support and sharpen the innate human abilities both for personal self-improvement and for the educational improvement of ways to understand and to change the world.

It is worth recalling that the German word for education, *Bildung*, which is at that time used as a translation of “culture”, is an idea coming from early Protestantism, constructed on the mutually supportive working community in which the Christian commune would be resurrected. According to the Preface to the first issue of 1783, these cultural values, attitudes, and passions are “zeal for the truth, a love of spreading useful Enlightenment, and the removal of vicious delusions with the conviction that the endeavour will be rewarded” (*ibid.*, p. 1; tr. D.D.).

This is repeated in the “Farewell Words to Patient Readers”, with which Biester closed the magazine in 1811: “[...] from the first to the last issue we were guided by the fact that we reasonably defend the achieved truth, to give shelter against the attacks of hypocrisy and evil, to protest – at least in words – against the absurdities of the age, to stubbornly bring to light what is valuable but nowadays forgotten, to strive, along with entertainment, to share useful knowledge and, in the end, to respect the laws of morality and the Fatherland” (Biester, 1811, p. VI; tr. D.D.).

The unity of these goals and attitudes in the various thematic blocks of the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*”, the combination of values and desires give us sufficient grounds to look for the identity of the enlightened and enlightening consciousness in each publication. Its reality

is achieved with unshakable confidence in the meaning of the enlightenment work as a persistent continuation of lineal and consciously continued experience, and not merely through vain personal effort in contemplation of the primary entities. The aforementioned confidence comes from the meaning of the German word for consciousness (*Bewusstsein*), introduced in the so-called *German Metaphysics*. This is the *Reasonable Thoughts about God, the World and the Human Soul, also about All Things in General, Shared for All Lovers of Truth* by Christian Freiherr von Wolff. Like the first German magazine, published by Wolff's teacher, Christian Thomasius, this lavish and promising title is no less an accurate expression of the enlightenment idea. These "reasonable thoughts" of Wolff establish the basic terms, structure, method, and even examples of both academic philosophy and enlightenment journalism in Germany. According to Wolff, who follows Leibniz's *Monadology* in the critical extension of Cartesian rationalism and its rescue from the dangers of *I think, therefore only I exist*; we know unequivocally that we are aware of ourselves and other things. This conscious existence "makes us different from the very best sect of egoists that arose in Paris a little while ago and denies of all things that they are, but that I am [...]. It is especially important to us because we are inclined to carry out the natural knowledge of God and the soul, also of the world and all things in general, in an undoubted certainty" (Wolff, 1752, pp. 70-71, §§ 2-4; tr. D.D.).

This conviction of the enlightened consciousness is the reason why the "*Berlinische Monatsschrift*" should be presented as a discussion between authors and readers about the common goals and benefits of knowledge for the human race, about the work on their practical implementation, the subsequent moral obligations, and judgments in the organisation of common affairs through common labour and common thinking. This consciousness can be found in the family, in the state, in humanity, even reaching the inhabitants of the planets in the solar system. This last is described by Kant in the *Universal Natural Theory and History of Heaven*: as we move away from the sun, the efficiency of moral and labour qualities increases (*NTH*, AA 01: 356-357).

In its various genre forms, this conversation is presented in baroque-ornamental extravagance. It is anything but superficial; beneath the surface there are "big questions", which sometimes can be sharply stated to the point of distaste and often solved comically, even from the perspective of knowledge at that time. Behind this diversity is the essence of the Enlightenment as a constellation of super-foundations, i.e. *hypertheses*.

In the linguistic sense, "hyperthesis" means a shift of vowels in one word, which rarely leads to another real use (Zemb, 2001). As a general concept, it is mostly introduced by Willy Helpach, a well-known and now forgotten German ethnopsychologist and politician in the 1930s, one of the founders of Environmental psychology, to complement the classical triad thesis-antithesis-synthesis, and to describe the nationalist denial of liberalism (Helpach, 1938, p. 114). I use the term mostly in intuitive understanding as the opposite of a hypothesis, as a super-thesis in which a traditional understanding of the historically universal changes the contextual content of immediate history so that the facts of the past fall under the shadow of today's authorities. In this sense, the overcoming of hypertheses is a part of historical honesty and helps to avoid the prejudice of authority (Denkov, 1995). To some extent, the concept of hyperthesis is also related to Kant's critical attitude towards "hyperphysics" in "On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy" about "pure *metaphysics*": "[...] it also covertly interpolates a hyperphysics, i.e., not just principles of practical reason, but a theory of the nature of the super-sensible (of God and the human mind), and purports to know this in 'not so very fine-spun' a fashion" (*VT*, AA 08: 399n; Kant, 2002, p. 440n).

2 What is Enlightenment? in four texts

In the second volume of the "*Berlinische Monatsschrift*" (1784) there is an enlightening conversation about the essence of Enlightenment. It provides a meaningful coverage of the

described frameworks for enlightened and enlightening consciousness through visibly diverse works: the fable “The Monkey” by Z. (Zöllner, 1784); Kant’s “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (Kant, 1784); the anonymous letter about the chess machine and the talking machine of Kempelen (Anon., 1784) with the comment of the publisher Biester (1784). The texts are representative of the most popular Enlightenment genres – fables, answers to questions, letters and comments. Today we usually pay attention to letters and comments, while fables and answers to questions have been shifted to the lower educational and different research tasks. It is somewhat understandable: the old answers we gave sound like fables, while the letters and comments assume a personal commitment.

If we agree with the publishers of the magazine that enlightenment presupposes “translations of important, still neglected masterpieces from antiquity” (Gedicke & Biester, 1783, p. 1; tr. D.D.), it would be well to recall them as examples of the reality of the enlightenment discussion that has faded today with the prominence of the most authoritative voice in it. The recollection of that voice will bring us back to the dialogical diversity, the neglect of which subordinates the polyphony to a *cantus firmus*, namely Kant, and thus reveal important motives for a fuller understanding. In addition, it will introduce us to the concept of Enlightenment in its inherent atmosphere more directly than any established historical typology, substantiating factuality and later theoretical reasoning. This is also necessary in view of the fact that, at least to best of my knowledge, no special attention has been paid to the dialogical unity in these texts.¹ They reveal essential features for understanding the concept in a concrete development in its two meanings – “enlightenment” as a property and activity of consciousness and “Enlightenment” as a name of a historical epoch. We must also not forget that the German word for “enlightenment”, *Aufklärung*, covers a wide area from “clarifying an issue” through an explanation to “military intelligence of the enemy’s intentions”.

It was not strange for the reader in 1784 to find Z’s fable, which presents and ridicules the naïveté of the rapid enlightenment: a monkey sets fire to a hayloft and calls the herd to see the light in the dark night; the herd quickly declares him an enlightenment hero of the Fatherland. After the fable, the reader receives Kant’s answer, which includes several possibilities. The first one is that Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed minority under the motto *sapere aude*. This enlightenment requires nothing but freedom to make public use of one’s reason in all matters. Therefore, a public can achieve enlightenment only slowly. A revolution may bring about the end of a personal despotism or of avaricious tyrannical oppression, but never a true reform of modes of thought; “in this regard this age is the age of the enlightenment or the century of Frederick”; only he can say what a free state cannot dare to say: Argue as much as you like, and about what you like, but obey! At last free thought acts even on the fundamentals of government and the state finds it agreeable to treat man, who is now more than a machine, in accord with his dignity (cf. *WA*, AA 08: 33-42; Kant, 1784; Kant, 1996). This answer is followed by a “Letter on the Kempelen Chess Machine and the Talking Machine”. It describes “the greatest invention of mechanics and magic (in which the word is not offensive at all)” (Anon., 1784, p. 496). The anonymous author believes that “[...] for mechanics, it is hardly a complicated task to make a human-like doll in a Turkish costume to move chess pieces on the board; it should also not be so difficult for any experienced mechanic to create a machine that will have to be wound each time to respond with a move that he wants to play. Therefore, even if this machine seems remarkable to us from the point of view of mechanical art, it is still not the *non plus ultra* for

¹ H.-M. Gerlach (2004, p. 55) connects Kant’s text with the monkey fable, but does not continue with Kempelen’s chess machine, probably because he used a selection of texts from the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*”, and not the whole edition, fully digitized by the University of Bielefeld Library in the Collection of Journals of the German Enlightenment (<http://ds.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/collections/zeitschriftenderaufklaerung/>).

him. What is really inexplicable in this case, however, is how Mr. von Kempelen acts or causes the machine to be acted upon; it forces me to talk about magic, a mystery whose unravelling has excited so many thought glands in Germany, France and England [...]” (Biester, 1784, p. 511; tr. D.D.).

However, for Biester “it is Mr. von Kempelen’s greater duty to reveal the secret of his machines [...]. Until then, the best thing that can be done in this case is to remain silent” (*ibid.*, p. 514; tr. D.D.). Failure to disclose secrets, including mechanisms, is a public sin that is greater for Biester than any religious one. He has no way of knowing that it is this doll in Turkish costume that will cause the verb *türken*, synonymous with “cheat, cunning, hide”, to appear in German. Today, however, we are right to claim that such enlightenment descriptions and attitudes have led to this.

3 The most general statement of the problem

These works are direct answers to the question “What is Enlightenment?” according to the goals of the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*”: the first is a critique of imitation and the naive joy of temporary success; the second explains the concept of freedom of thought of the private and public use of reason in connection with religious affairs, and describes the epoch, the “age of Frederick”, in which a social revolution would be dangerous, as opposed to a revolution in thought. The third describes exhaustively strange devices with a cautious assessment, discussing the problem of the possible abuse of technical skills in particular and knowledge in general, condemning profiting from human naivety. However, nowadays only one of them is still so significant – Kant’s “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” – due to the concept of Enlightenment, full of pathos with *sapere aude*. By virtue of the tradition of privileging the answers given by later authorities, this short but eminent work by Kant has cast a shadow over the others. That is why today their equality seems like a mania for originality or a search for unnecessary literality, coming from a mania for completeness. These two obsessions are found in the so-called postmodern discourse, undoubtedly a consequence of a rather dull tradition. However, the point is not to present tradition as interesting: it would not become a tradition if it were not of general interest for a certain period of time. Therefore, it is necessary for it to be shown, explained and understood in its reality and in the special historical primacy of a single case. This is also justified by the purely linguistic sense in which “history” in German can refer both to “happening” (*geschehen*) and to “layering” (*Ge-schichte*). But it is precisely the dialogical unity that requires the reading of the examples in the sequence in which early readers saw them as successive texts. This presupposes a serious attitude towards all texts, not only a selective reading of the “most important” in the stratum, since the former give the reader an idea of the “Enlightenment” formation almost in the geological sequence with which we think of history. There is no doubt that all texts are initially interesting to the enlightened and enlightening reader; only after becoming acquainted with them could he make his judgment. In this sense, any *a priori* evaluation of a text would be immoral for him.

Furthermore, this reader was certainly both unfamiliar with Kant’s critical work and unaware of the further historical impact of his answer on the understanding of Enlightenment in general. He could not have foreseen that Kant, who had already given the magazine a critical opinion of a universal history from a world-civic point of view on the idea of his former student Herder (*IaG*, AA 08: 15-31), would henceforth become one of the most regular contributors. It was his numerous publications in the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” that were going to make him famous beyond the very narrow circle of readers of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this respect, he was constantly encouraged by the publisher Biester, who thus saw the best way to put an end to “the fashionable philosophical dream for the time being in a few small works in the magazine, until time is found for a comprehensive work”

(J.E. Biester to I. Kant, 6 March 1786, in *Br* 261, AA 10: 433; tr. D.D.). Here Kant would publish many important, sometimes curious, reflections on scientific and educational issues in a typical Enlightenment variety – the volcanoes of the moon, the illegality of reprinting, the imaginary beginning of history, the orientation of thought, the failure of philosophical attempts at theodicy, the radical evil in human nature, the saying that something can be right in theory but not in practice, the influence of the moon on the climate, the end of all things, a decent tone in philosophy, mathematical disputes, towards eternal peace and for the supposed right of people to lie. They are all usually signed with “Im. Kant”, sometimes with the addition “Königsberg in Prussia”, while in the contents they are announced with the invariable “Herr Prof. Kant”. For the unprejudiced reader, this name was no more authoritative than the initial “Z.”, “Mr. **” or Biester. For them, and for every enlightened reader, the text was far more important than who wrote it before it became world famous.

It is curious what this reader could discover in the contents of the second issue of the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” for 1784. There he could read interesting articles about the course of the general inspection of the entire educational work by the “Society of Practical Educators”, about the supposed Count Cagliostro, about the astrologers and the impressions of foreigners concerning Berlin etc.; what he was thinking is inaccessible to us. In the same way, we do not know what Lampe, Kant’s servant, was thinking when he went for daily walks after the enlightener, whose spirit admired the moral law within himself and in the starry sky above him. However, we can safely assume that Lampe knew well: if it rained from the sky, he was obliged to open the umbrella over Kant’s head.

But if today’s reader misses such an arrangement of a fable, an answer to a question and a letter with comments, on the grounds that it is arbitrary for Kant to be included in the company of anonymous authors such as Z., Mr. ** and the now forgotten but very influential publisher Biester; if he hastily decides that there is no particular logic in this arrangement – neither formal, dialectical, nor historical – the result will be the following: he will miss important points in the understanding of the Enlightenment in general and in particular Kant’s place in it. Therefore, difficult as it is to meet the demand to give up the value qualifications imposed by later historical development, it is worth attempting a more thorough study of these works around Kant’s “Answering the Question”. All this confronts us with a hermeneutic task, for the solution of which the given texts are especially important. That task is to extract from them that content which certainly was not presupposed by their authors, but whose necessary existence is an essential condition for understanding the authors better than they understood each other. Moreover, we hope that in this way we will further our understanding of ourselves as participants in a dialogue within the Enlightenment’s tradition.

4 Hyperthetical unity according to “Answering the Question”

The four texts do not coincide in the order of the second volume of the “*Berlinische Monatsschrift*” from 1784. Their consecutive reading today towards the point of current interest – the question of the reality of Enlightenment – directs their substantive content to the sought-after truth about it. It depends on the passed down notion of the Enlightenment and can be found in the intersectional area, where each of the works loses its independence and makes sense in terms of thematic coincidence with the true content, with the “idea” of Enlightenment. Therefore, it is possible to abstract from the generic features of the text, from the intentionality or randomness of their arrangement, from the specific goals of their authors and to consider them as a single testimony to the reality of enlightened consciousness. The

subject content of the texts is hyperthetically understandable from the true content of their topic.²

Z.'s simple fable, whose literary quality is as dubious today as it was in 1784, parodies the ultimate enlightenment goals and the means to achieve them with the worn-out but convincing and amiable images of the ape imitation. The fact that every enlightenment presupposes imitation is as obvious as the fact that every imitation frustrates true Enlightenment. The personal justification of instinctive crime through cosmic analogies that turn evil into pseudo-goodness, and the reckless joy of the crowd over short-term benefits received as a gift rather than concrete action, present Enlightenment not so much as dangerous but as ridiculous. The year is 1784, and people like Z., visibly doubting the consequences of Enlightenment, would hardly admit its nightmarish manifestations in the next century, nor would they ever predict an evolutionary theory that would scientifically directly link humans to apes. In this ridicule speaks the original characteristic of the tolerant, enlightened consciousness – it is cheerful and self-ironic and is able to laugh at itself, but not to anticipate the consequences and to condemn through “possible experience”. Of course, ridicule can also be taken seriously for it can become the basis of dignified behaviour. Its connection with the refusal of a radical change of the cosmic order presupposes doubt in the mass admiration for momentary phenomena. It also attaches the enlightened not to the “tribe” and the “Fatherland”, but to their own responsibility for specific deeds. Yet for Z. the sinister is substantially impossible. Therefore, behind the mocking suspicion of imitative inclusion lies the affirmation of the individuality, which we can call benevolently self-critical and, only then, critical towards others. Thus, Z.'s fable is not a critique of Enlightenment, but only a critique of the Enlightenment as a ridiculous imitation and overcoming of nature with the very transparent images of the monkey herd, which enjoys the light of the burning hayloft.

Kant's “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” is also text-transparent, in tone with the general enlightenment idea. Unlike the fable, it is not in a critical style – otherwise it would not be an “answer”, but it is rather in an affirmative style. Rhetorically, common examples of the innate potential of Enlightenment are also used here, and the placid human minority is ironised by showing how easy it is to operate through someone else's mind for a fee. By the way, both behind the natural-gender and behind the social-professional division of “capable-incapable” of the Enlightenment, the firm conviction of the enlightened guardians, such as Kant, is evident. He owes his enlightening position to both his pietistic upbringing and his public service as a professor at the University of Königsberg. This conviction can be noticed in the subject of the topic and the purpose of the text, i.e. answering the question mainly from the perspective of religious deeds with a nod to the ruler, who otherwise treats the circle around the magazine with aristocratic arrogance. This is a tried and widely-used tactic in the Enlightenment, whose German version (including Kant's) seldom reaches the extremes of doubt: it is a matter of caution not to break the link between loyal duty and personal faith. Certainly, this comes from the pre-Protestant-pietistic notion of the predetermined will, which can be both freely abused and purposefully used for the good of man. Since understanding and reason are used as synonyms in the text, it can be argued that Kant fully shares the essential characteristic of Enlightenment – the cult of rational thinking and prudent arrangement of human affairs. But insofar as verbally in German the way out of infancy (*Unmündigkeit*) is presented as the ability to “speak with one's own mouth” (*Mund*) and to flow (*münden*) into a larger “natural togetherness”, Enlightenment is understood as an era of public exercise of the will and free critique of the symbols and rules which hinder the development of humanity, although they might otherwise be permissible in a hierarchically

² “Subject and true content” are used in the sense of W. Benjamin as one of the expressions of the Enlightenment mindset, which critically seeks the true content, i.e. the universal, at the expense of the commentator's explanation of the subject content, i.e. of the contextual (*cf.* Benjamin, 1980a, p. 297).

closed religious or educational community. Thus, Kant maintains the traditional notion of the limited access of “the whole fair sex” (*das ganze schöne Geschlecht*) in this and in every social hierarchy. In his opinion, woman’s nature presupposes social guardians. The guarding is also to be imposed on men, until they reach adulthood through training and revelation. This does not mean that women and young adults cannot express their own thoughts about the structure of common affairs, but that their opinions should not be taken seriously unless they are scholars communicating their thoughts to all mankind.

The courage to use one’s own reason in publicising one’s thoughts is tamed by the loyal attitude towards the enlightened monarch, who is the individual guarantor and at the same time a symbol of both community and Enlightenment with the no less convincing motto “Argue as much as you like, and about what you like, but obey!”. This places the Enlightenment within the framework of spiritual freedom, complemented by prudent, not mechanical following of rules – the enlightened man is “something more than a machine”. At the same time, he is more than nature, as he can overcome its automatism in his achievements, born of the free imagination in observing the rules of thinking.

This is curiously testified by the letter of Mr. ** and the addition of Biester. These are actually the two most enlightening texts, if we are guided by the extended concept of Enlightenment. They present characteristic features of the enlightenment attitude: extravagant in their descriptions and explanatory in their conclusions, curious about the sensational inventions; presenting multidisciplinary reference to other observations; introducing comparative evaluation of the beneficial and the obligatory part the moral judgment.

Kempelen’s chess machine has been one of the most discussed and controversial achievements of the imagination for at least half a century. This apparatus is defined both as a supreme combination of mechanical art and reason, and as a very cunning, yet charlatanic exploitation of human naivety in an eternal goal – making money. Accepted by crowned heads since its construction, it passed through all major fairs and exhibitions in Europe and North America; the “Turk” of Kempelen and Melzel continued to arouse curiosity even after the fire in the Pennsylvania Museum, where it burned in 1854. Almost every “enlightened” person from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth had an opinion about this and, depending on her/his assessment, gave the possible solutions to a sharply posed question: “Can a thinking machine be created?” And while Mr. **’s personal experience with the chess machine combines astonishment with an unconvincing explanation, Biester’s comprehensive informational-theoretical acquaintance with the machine undoubtedly makes him a supporter of the negative answer for logical and moral reasons. He ranks among those educators for whom the attempt to create a thinking machine is blasphemous and undisguised charlatany. Like most German educators, he limits the mechanical arts to general utility and does not think that it could be applied to thinking. So Biester retains the purely ideological character of the Enlightenment and thus the belief in the impossibility of its mechanical implementation. The fight against prejudice, which is the duty of educators, appears to him as a duty to reveal secrets.

Failure to do so neglects one of the conditions of the enlightened consciousness – personal imagination. Technically it can be applied not only when it contributes to the “benefit of science”, but also when it is shared with the whole “reading world”, so that everyone can easily make use of hitherto unimaginable achievements. This lofty educational requirement in Germany has its origin in the guilds: a master is obliged to present to the public the scheme of his work so that everyone can have access to the secrets of the craft.³

³ Kempelen’s automaton and its improvements by Johann Melzel have no special place in the history of technology; in literature, however, it is associated with many stories and allusions – especially in German Romanticism, and in the descriptions by Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire; in philosophy, its fame is mainly due to its use by Walter Benjamin as a metaphor for historical materialism and its theological origins (Benjamin, 1980b, p. 693).

The texts are united in another noticeable aspect. They argue with each other in a special way and pass into each other. The fable “The Monkey” casts doubt on the Enlightenment. Its positivity, however, is confirmed in “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” by the unwavering fact that man is more than a machine and is continued in the description of a famous machine. But this is also explainable by the vices and weaknesses of man’s charlatantry. All this is done through the use of the same images.

In view of these texts, the real answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” should be expressed through one requirement: to protest against the treatment of man as an animal and a machine. As a dialectical consequence of this “protest”, the ape imitation will be born as one of the markers of racial inferiority, while the “man-machine” will become a stable phrase, which exposes the insensitivity of technology.⁴

5 Hypothetical reading along the line of asking the question

There are several reasons for paying attention to these four texts. The most obvious is the hyperthetical presence of Kant’s “Answering the Question”. There are undoubtedly sufficient grounds for centring it and defining it as more valuable than the others. These grounds reinforce its historical impact on the concept of Enlightenment. It is revertive and obviously more powerful than the supposed influences of other – and very similar – texts, among which Kant’s “Answering” stands at the end of 1784, when his name did not have the prestige and authority it has today.

Beyond the purely genre preferences and personal tastes, some fundamental facts are certainly crucial here. These may not be directly related to the text itself, which is not particularly original apart from the fact that it is written by Kant. These facts usually point to other historical merits of its author. It seems that we focus on this text because it is from Kant’s pen, and not, say, Moses Mendelssohn’s, who gave such a response the month before (Mendelssohn, 1784, pp. 193-200). His whole work, but above all the *Critiques*, in time would have a far firmer place in history than Mendelssohn’s, not to mention the clumsy fable of the monkey by a certain Z., the interest of Mr. ** in machines, and even the publisher Biester, to whom Kant owes much of his popularity.

It is also clear that we distinguish the text in question because we usually think in the mode of answers. Kant tries to interpret and conceptually determine a response to an essential question about the character of a historical epoch in general, while the works among which it stands are randomly linked things, such as criticism of imitation or descriptions and evaluations of technical devices. They are interesting if we are examining the Enlightenment’s notions of the images of imitation and wrongdoing in fables or the abuse of a belief, supported by many educators, that automatons can think and perform typically human actions. Then we may come across – also by chance – the fable, the letter about Kempelen’s machines and Biester’s comment. Otherwise, such texts, since they are neither the first of their kind nor particularly original, are doomed to stand on the margins of history and on the outskirts of the concepts that philosophy usually deals with. If those texts are revived, it will be primarily due to their proximity to others, historically closer to the essence of the era. And it would be pure arbitrariness to imagine a possible story in which Z.’s trivial

⁴ The “man-machine”, at the time refers mostly to a French physician, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, who is ridiculed in enlightened Berlin society for his scandalous behaviour at the court of Friedrich Wilhelm II. Kant probably hardly read his famous essay *Man a Machine*, and this essay in no way influences Kant, although many think it does. Rather, the clear definition describes the positive notion of the automaton coming from demonology, alchemy, and medicine, which at the time is associated more with the magician’s dexterity than with everyday utility. Via the Romantics, this reaches Heidegger and is represented by his *Ge-stell*.

fable, Mr. **’s curious letter about von Kempelen’s devices with Biester’s comments would have a central place in making sense of the Enlightenment, but not Kant’s “Answering the Question”.

However, if the enlightenment task is to multiply real explanatory grounds and lead to understanding from new, striking points of view, the most immediate possibility is a change of perspective, which it is worthwhile to adopt in a Copernican way towards Kant himself. This means that we should not look for an answer, but rather consider the conditions under which this question is asked, so that in effect Kant does not formulate the answer himself, but the question leads to Kant’s way of answering.

If we paraphrase the famous passage from the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* about “Copernicus’ first thoughts”⁵ and link it to the Enlightenment, we can say that things are similar here: there is no advance in the explanations; they are in the same state and are repeated in multiplied factuality. This is probably because most attempts are based on historically universal and authoritative answers to the question and their authors, and attention is rarely paid to its contextual and curious variants and carriers. Continuing with the astronomical metaphor that the “Copernican turn” provokes, we have the right to claim that in order to ignore the generated context, the viewer most often stares at the late light of a star without seeing the others, extinguished or shaded when it explodes. This does not bother us; moreover, it obliges us to ask to what extent it has required part of their energy to reach us. Therefore, bearing in mind the description of the phenomena, it will be better to make the viewer not only look at them, but also see the central star in the force fields of those around it. In this way we will arrive at an understanding of the contextual-constellation type, which will convince us that each of the stars is essentially a function of the other stars, and they at the same time are a function of it. And if the enlightenment task is to multiply real explanatory grounds and lead to understanding from new points of view, this simple change of perspective is in fact the most immediate possibility in trying to explain things that strive to correspond to the essence of things. Sometimes it is nothing but their “togetherness”.

According to Kant, it is actually the “essential element in the change in the ways of thinking” (*KrV*, B XVI; Kant, 1998, p. 110). The purpose of this change is not at all to change the belief with regard to one subject, i.e. it does not mean that we need to change our view of the historical importance of Kant’s response to understanding Enlightenment. Rather, we are dealing here with the change of a stable belief based on hitherto unused grounds, in the same way that Kant approaches metaphysics, following Copernicus’ approach to astronomy, “when he did not make good progress in the explanation of celestial motions” (*KrV*, B XVI; Kant, 1998, p. 110). Judging by the consequences of these approaches, we can say that in both cases the methodological change had historical consequences in a revolutionary sense for thinking about objects. It is as if, after Kant, the metaphysics of earlier times began to seem as problematic as the Ptolemaic system in astronomy after Copernicus for one reason alone: a change of perspective. However, if we are judging by the historical reality of the beliefs of both Kant and Copernicus, we must take into account that the change in the method is driven primarily by the search for a more efficient and more consistent explanation of all things, and not just of one that is valid for the most noticeable reasons. Only after this change are the consequences for thinking about things possible; the belief, however, that they can be thought and realised in a more correct way, remains. The change in the method is not at all related to the quality of the beliefs, understood teleologically (and also theologically) as reasons for the explanation. It is associated with a special moral commitment to everything

⁵ “This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest” (*KrV*, B XVI; Kant, 1998, p. 110).

that exists, which has its originality in the point that it is deep and unknowable, but stands next to others. To that extent the attention given to such texts as Z.'s fable, Mr. **'s letter and Biester's comment satisfies the requirement of historical honesty. That is why the attempt to see the essence of Enlightenment through them is not as arbitrary as it may seem to us. This will result in a more complete and morally sound concept of Enlightenment. It will help us deal with a prejudice of causative authority – it is both personal and historical.

Therefore, we are interested in these reasons, which are related to the burden of today's concepts with meanings in their initial use. I will call this *reversible cultural reproduction*. In it, a modern state treats its beginnings in the past as if it had been teleologically foreseen there, but has been left as unimportant. This facilitates the extraction of the concepts from their timeless context, whereby this context is "stuffed" to the point that it does not play any special role in the impact of the concepts in question in understanding the objects for which they are used. This is evident in the fate of all words that are terminologised in order to acquire a general or philosophical meaning, even though they initially had a very understandable flexibility of meaning in possible everyday uses. This is the case with concepts such as *beginning, reason, logos, idea* etc., unlike, for example, those technical terms that are invented to describe common meanings missing in everyday sensitivity – for example, *apeiron*. And if in Plato the Socratic fullness of meanings still lives, which guarantees engaging in dialogue as an ironic shift of the interlocutor to the truth, then in Aristotle there is the methodical conviction which brings philosophy into the stream of science. Science and philosophy – as well as knowledge in general – must use words that the common people use in a different sense or not use them at all. This is complemented by the notion that philosophical knowledge deals with a reality for which no language has been invented so far and must be created accordingly. This is in line with Hegel's idea that the conceptual-terminological use is in fact the richness of concreteness, which goes far beyond the abstraction of everyday life, where the same word has degraded to a sign without a concept. The interest in it seems to be somewhat archival, if Nietzsche's famous expression on documentary history is used. And when archivists are told to revive documents from the past, they do so with characteristic literalism and without much imagination, looking today for the features of once-available possibilities. Thus, each historical concept has an essential objective meaning, while its meaning is built from circulating around it different uses of other objects and, accordingly, of other contexts. But we seem to be interested only in those which have a historical impact in the sense of a history of winners.

Through this mechanism, today we find the Enlightenment in the four texts only when it nominally coincides with the form in which we think of it, but we pass over it where it is not explicitly and conceptually addressed. At the same time, the philosophical-conceptual reshaping of reality is triggered in such a way that today Z.'s fable and the anonymous' description of the chess machine and the speaking machine are forgotten, while the concept of Enlightenment, conveniently driven by Kant to formal clarity as the public use of reason, remains. Here we want to problematise this very "clear" concept by asking and answering the question "What is Enlightenment?" in its immediate context.

Today it is obvious that Kant's "Answering the question: What is Enlightenment?" is the most notable. The other texts are greatly overshadowed; they have seldom come into the view of Enlightenment and Kant researchers. The unshakable beginning "*Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority*" (WA, AA 08: 35; Kant, 1996, p. 17) is an axiom, the repetition of which, along with the clarity of the idea, imposes a taste of the sometimes irritating instructiveness inherent in every educator. This axiom has made the already enlightened world seem not so much useful and pleasant as, first of all, unquestioningly judging the truth and, accordingly, condemning human weaknesses, showing the way of overcoming them. Therefore, it is not only a striving for originality, but also a natural self-defence from this intrusiveness, when one has to ask: Would not it be more

useful and pleasant if the next generations had received cultural and historical value from these texts – Z’s fable with its open irony or the informative letter about Kempelen’s devices with Biester’s curious teaching, and not to have the somewhat rigorous “Answering the Question” from Kant, which revolves around religious affairs and echoes the Westphalian peace treaty’s settlement of religious disputes in the state as a regulation of public and private use of the faith? Why should we remember and re-read today those in whose company he appeared at the time? Just to create an imaginary interlocutor position?

Of course, it can be assumed that if Z., Kant, Mr. ** and Biester had travelled through time with their ideas about Enlightenment to today and discovered that the answer had only theoretical relevance to the topic, they would not be surprised, because for them every theoretical text has validity beyond its time. Therefore, they would probably understand without much surprise the socio-political importance of the topic in our time; it has the same significance at the end of the eighteenth century.

Certainly, all three would probably be surprised by the historical disregard for the texts surrounding Kant’s response, which would give them good reason to distrust their heirs. This is a distrust of those who stare only at the most important thing, but also of those who miss the ornament that often determines reality. Because, in fact, the fable about the monkey, which precedes Kant’s famous answer, belongs to pastor Johann Friedrich Zöllner, the man who first sharply posed in Germany the question “What is Enlightenment?” in a footnote in his article “Is It Reasonable for a Marriage to no Longer be Sanctioned by Religion”: “What is enlightenment? This question, which is nearly as important as ‘What is truth?’ should be answered before one begins to enlighten” (Zöllner, 1783, p. 516). It was directed against a “Proposal that the Clergy Should no Longer be Involved in the Contract of Marriage” by J. von B., i.e. Johann von Biester (1783), the publisher of the magazine and guardian of concubinage. In this company, the answering of Kant is accidental in the ongoing dialogue between two of the most famous enlightened educators and leading members of the influential Wednesday Society: one critical-dogmatic, the other: modern-critical. At the same time, Kant’s “Answering the Question” is sort of ironical view of today’s reality, insofar as it stands between two former extremes in an eternal requirement for independent thinking in its solitude, appearing as it does in a metropolitan magazine as the point of view of West Siberia, then called Königsberg in Prussia, today Kaliningrad in Russia.

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