

The “Age of Enlightenment” is not the “Enlightened Age”: revisiting Kant's (1724–1804) argument on the Enlightenment

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Abstract

The Enlightenment era, critical as a period in its own right, is also a pivotal phase in the history of Christianity. Also critical in this period was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a formidable scholar who formulated and differentiated between Age of Enlightenment and the Enlightened Age. Kant's background, early learning and life in academia provide the necessary background to understand the intellectual journey of philosophising that was to culminate with, among others, this formulation and differentiation. Kant argued that society was still in the Age of Enlightenment because both the individual and the public are still under tutelage that was self-imposed. Tutelage is a complex process and has methods of sustaining and advancing itself. It is possible for human beings to be released from this tutelage but since the majority of the society is still under this tutelage, society has not reached the Enlightened Age. The Age of Enlightenment and the Enlightened Age are two distinct phenomena, worthy of note and differentiation in the broader history of Christianity.

Introduction

This article aims to revisit Kant's definition of the Enlightenment. His definition is located in a time and context that was grappling to understand what was taking place. Kant defines the Enlightenment by differentiating between the “Age of Enlightenment” and the “Enlightened Age”. His belief was that the two were not the same.

Immanuel Kant, born in 1724, became Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at Königsberg University in 1770 (even though he had been a self-employed lecturer since 1755); he resigned his professorship in 1797 and died in 1804. During his lifetime, he shifted the parameters of knowledge and refined the art of knowing. In this article, we will look at one of the areas of his discourse – “dare to know”.

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Any scholar of the Enlightenment will, in my view, find their work called into question if they have no knowledge of who Immanuel Kant was. Kant was one of the most influential scholars of his time and, even though his professorship lasted only 27 years, his achievements during this tenure resound to this day.

By way of navigating confidently through this article, I have devised the following subthemes. These are (a) Kant’s brief biography; (b) the quest to revisit Kant’s argument on the Enlightenment; (c) Kant’s definition of the Enlightenment; and (d) a postscript, continuing the debate. The work will close with a conclusion that serves as a synthesis of what I have tried to accomplish.

Immanuel Kant: a brief biography

Birth, early learning and schooling

Kant was born on 22 April 1724 on the outskirts of Königsberg¹ (now Kaliningrad)² in East Prussia, the fourth of nine children. He came from a family with a modest background (his father³ was a harness-maker/saddler) that could also be referred to as poor.⁴ While young, Kant attended the following schools: Vostäder (1730–1732), Hospitalschule and later Friedrichskollegium⁵ (1732–1740). According to Haden, “his mother’s image seems to have impressed him more strongly than his father’s”.⁶ It was also his mother who contributed greatly to his early learning. Haden elaborates:

Even as an old man, he spoke of her with deeply felt love and emotion, although he lost her when he was only thirteen. He was conscious of having experienced through her, the spiritual influences that remained decisive for his entire concept and conduct of life ... His mother also seems to have been the first to recognise the boy’s intellectual gifts, and she decided, on the advice of her spiritual counselor, the theology professor and preacher Frans Albert Schultz, to guide him toward an academic institution.⁷

Owing to his parents’ poverty, Kant was to depend on the support of his friends, specifically Albert Schultz (1692–1763),⁸ who was not only professor of Theology, but also principal of the school that Kant was to attend.

Kant was influenced by pietism, both from his family background⁹ and from the Friedrichskollegium (also called Collegium Fridericianum),¹⁰ which he entered in 1732 at the age of eight.¹¹ Pietism, in German Protestantism, was a 17th century movement that espoused a pious lifestyle and had as

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its goal the reformation of the church. For Kant, “despite his disapproval of pietistic cult forms, [he] always esteemed the basic pietistic stance, which recalls the imperturbable equanimity of the Stoic sage”.¹² We also need to keep in mind the pietistic influence of his mother from an early age. Haden presents a critique on Collegium Fridericianum. He writes:

Even after thirty years, David Ruhnken, at that time a famous teacher of philology at the University of Leiden, who had attended the Fridericianum with Kant, speaks of the “pedantic and gloomy discipline of fanatics” to which their life at school was subjected. A mere glance at the curriculum of the institution, filled with uninterrupted prayers and devotional exercises, with periods of edification, sermons, and catechization, confirms this judgment.¹³

Kant’s pietistic family background, his life and studies at Friedrichskollegium and the new turn that his life was to take, presented him with a formal penitential struggle.¹⁴ This was to cause him later in his Kantian philosophy to distinguish between a “religion of morality” and a “religion of ingratiating”.¹⁵

At the age of sixteen Kant enrolled at Albertina at the University of Königsberg. With the help of his friends and with earnings from private lessons he was able, from 1740 to 1746, to study mathematics and the natural sciences, theology, philosophy and classical literature. While Albert Schultz had an influence on Kant during his time at Friedrichskollegium, Martin Knutzen (1713–1751) was to have an influence on him during his time at university. In common with Schultz, Knutzen, a professor of logic and metaphysics, was a student of Christian Wolff. Knutzen drew Kant’s attention to the natural sciences. In addition to Knutzen’s efforts, the physics of Isaac Newton (1643–1725) were to exemplify for Kant strict scientific knowledge.¹⁶

... about this teacher, Martin Knutzen, and of his activity as instructor and author, does not immediately account for the depth of this influence [on Kant] ... nonetheless ... he was the sole person in Königsberg at that time able to affect Kant’s genius, this relates less to the content of his teaching than to the spirit in which it was presented. Of the teachers of the University of Königsberg, Knutzen alone represented the European concept of universal science.¹⁷

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Haden continues,

Through this teacher’s lectures and exercises, Kant entered into new intellectual atmosphere. The significance of the single fact that it was Knutzen who first lent him Newton’s works can hardly be overestimated, since for Kant Newton was the life-long personification of the concept of science ... from now on he attended Knutzen’s lectures in philosophy and mathematics ... A new cognitive horizon was thus disclosed to Kant, one which for his mind, oriented from the start toward systematization and methodology as it was, was bound also to transform the substance and the meaning of knowing.¹⁸

To sum up Kant’s youth,

... Kant was extremely stern with himself from his early youth. One of the maxims he had laid down from the start was to maintain his economic independence, because he saw in it a condition for the self-sufficiency of his mind and character. But although with advancing age Kant’s uncompromising sense of independence gradually brought something rigid and negative into his life, there is still visible in his youth a freer and unaffected flexibility in this regard, which was natural to his convivial character and sociable gifts. The harmony of these two tendencies, impulse to companionship and living communication, and at the same time the positive assertion of inward and outward freedom, is what gave Kant’s student life its balance.¹⁹

Academia: self-employment, university professor and key works

In 1746, after the death of his father, Kant left his university studies and began earning a living. As was the case with most scholars without strong personal finances, he made a living as a private tutor, a position which was also referred to as the Master of the Household. His first employment was with the reform minister Andersch²⁰ in Judschen,²¹ subsequently for the landowner Major von Hülsen (until about 1753) in Gross-Arnsdorf near Saalfeld,²² and finally for Count Keyserling²³ in Rautenburg,²⁴ although the later is disputed by Haden in his impressive analytical work.²⁵

During this time as a private tutor, Kant increased his scientific and philosophical knowledge. His first work was *Thoughts on the true estimation of living forces* (written in 1746, published in 1749). With regard to this work, Höffe criticises Kant for attempting too much in an area where a

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correct solution had already been reached by d’Alembert three years earlier in 1743.²⁶ In this early work of Kant we observe what was to become his distinctive character in the years to follow: “... transcendental critique of reason and interest in the natural sciences”.²⁷ This work was also to introduce Kant as a philosopher and to expose him to a lack of agreement by prominent philosophers on a well-defined problem – an experience that left him disturbed. This experience called into question the Enlightenment idea of a universal human reason.

Doubt and faith in human reason were to remain simultaneous for Kant, and accompany him all the way to the elaboration of his critical transcendental philosophy.²⁸

It is worth repeating here that Kant’s entry into the world of scholarship, wherein he experienced disagreement between prominent scholars, became for him the beginning of the questioning of the Enlightenment idea of universal human reason.

It was after his return to the university town of Königsberg that Kant was to become remarkably productive. In March 1755, he released the work *Universal natural history and the theory of the heavens*. This work was to dispense with theological considerations on the theory of the origins of the solar system and the entire cosmos. In this work, he based his arguments exclusively on the natural causes.²⁹ Kant produced and published all the above works prior to completing his doctoral thesis.

In the same year (1755), Kant was to complete his doctoral thesis. On 12 June of that year he presented a public lecture. In 1755, he became a private teacher with no university salary, earning his living from lecture attendance fees and private instruction. Even at this period in his career, Kant was continuing to study questions of natural science. He had not yet made, indeed there did not exist, a strict division between an empirical and a philosophical knowledge of nature. It was after the 1 November 1755 earthquake that destroyed two-thirds of the city of Lisbon that Kant developed an interest in the question of theodicy: the justification of God with regard to the suffering in the world. At this time, he also began to prioritise practical over theoretical reason. This aspect was to assume an even greater importance later on in his career.³⁰

At this stage, we once again observe that Kant’s real-life experiences were to influence his philosophy and his scholarly direction. Later in the autumn of the same year, 1755, Kant began his work as a lecturer. During his first years of university teaching, Kant produced no academic work of importance. This continued until 1761. It was only in 1766 that Kant finally received a remunerative post: as an assistant librarian at the palace library. Finally, in 1770, Kant (now 46 years of age) obtained his desired post as

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Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Königsberg. “In accordance with the customs of the time, Kant does not teach his own philosophy.”³¹ Höffe elaborates:

Kant understands better than any of his colleagues how to teach not philosophy but philosophizing: unbiased critical thought. Kant has a vivid and at the same time very accurate imagination; ... The philosopher has a highly inquiring mind and thus feels at home in remarkably many areas of study; he is not only an exact analytical thinker but also likes to study the “book of the world”.³²

While teaching at the university, Kant was frequently dean of his department. In the summer terms of 1786 and 1788, he became president of the university.

Let us now, briefly, turn our attention to the impact of the socio-political period on Kant’s intellectual flair. In 1758–1762 the city of Königsberg experienced the first Russian occupation. “The liberal occupation of the city brought the entire breadth and open-mindedness of the eastern life into the old, musty city”.³³ Höffe comments: “The class hierarchy loosens up; pietistic seriousness gives way to a freer attitude, and Prussian austerity to an almost luxurious life-style.” Kant, too, participates “in the gay bustle of the officers in private homes and officers’ casinos”.³⁴

With reference to scholars who influenced Kant, let us note that these include Newton, d’Alembert and Rousseau. In addition, Hume in particular was one of the greatest influences on Kant according to Hyland, Gomez and Greensides.³⁵ Hume’s account of causality, according to Kant, “first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave me a completely different direction to my enquiries in the field of speculative philosophy”.³⁶ This led to a trilogy of major works that were to establish his international reputation. These works are *Critique of pure reason* (1781),³⁷ *Critique of practical reason* (1788); and *Critique of judgement* (1790).³⁸

Let us turn now to the focus of this article. To start with, it is in the context of this important background history and the important works that Kant produced that in 1784 – being 14 years after his appointment as Professor of Logic and Metaphysics – that Kant was to produce the work: *What is Enlightenment?* This work was produced as part of a competition held by the Enlightenment journal *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (*Berlin Monthly*),³⁹ attempting to answer the question: What is Enlightenment? It is this work that is the focus of this article and the article revisits Kant’s argument in this work.

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The quest for a revisit

The title of this article differentiates between two important concepts: the “Age of Enlightenment” and the “Enlightened Age”. The two concepts can be easily confused in scholarly discourse. Although very similar, they are not the same in description and definition – as we shall observe from Kant’s analysis.

Why is it necessary to differentiate between these two concepts? It is necessary to differentiate between them because they are, in the field of Church History, definitive of an era that became one of the important turning points in the history of Christianity. This was an era in which a definition was sought to explain what the Enlightenment was all about. This definition was sought within the very period and context of the Enlightenment. Therefore, a construct was needed to develop a body of the thought that would help to explain and to understand the times – then. Immanuel Kant became the scholar whose elaborated definition and profound analysis won the day.

Furthermore, Kant’s definition became the cornerstone work upon which further discourses on the Enlightenment were to be constructed. It is worth recapping at this juncture that Kant’s construct of the Enlightenment took place as part of an intellectual competition to solicit a definition of the Enlightenment.⁴⁰ Thus, many scholars were involved in making sense of the Enlightenment.

Let us now study what Kant understood the Enlightenment to be. In doing this, we shall examine the actual work on the Enlightenment, as presented in Kant’s manuscript. However, I acknowledge the shortcomings of the original manuscript we shall be using. The original manuscript that Kant wrote was in German. Thus, the question posed was: *Was ist Aufklärung?* (*What is Enlightenment?*).

In this article I used a translated English version of the manuscript. Although there are various English versions of this manuscript, I confine myself to the version captured in the following work by Kramnick (1995), *The portable Enlightenment reader*. Owing to the detailed nature of the argument I present only part of it appears in this article.

What is the Enlightenment? Kant’s argument

It is impossible to define the Enlightenment in a single sentence. Furthermore, a paragraph-sized definition would not suffice to communicate clearly what Kant defined the Enlightenment to be.

According to Kant and pertinent to the definition and its understanding, the following subthemes are necessary: (a) precursor causing the need for Enlightenment; (b) Enlightenment to the individual; (c) Enlightenment to the public; (d) the need for Enlightenment in religious matters; and

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(e) the role for political leaders to maintain a climate enhancing Enlightenment. (The latter two subthemes will not be covered in this article.)

These five subheadings are not explicitly written as such in Kant’s work. His work has no headings apart from the manuscript’s title: What is Enlightenment? In order, therefore, to identify, differentiate and make the connection between these subheadings,⁴¹ careful, continuous and constant reading of Kant’s work is required. Every word, sentence and paragraph in Kant’s work requires attentive reading as each is loaded with meaning and they are all connected later in the same work. Therefore, his work is a coherent, tightly stitched whole and questions arising from it are answered somewhere later on in the same work. If a question is raised somewhere in the beginning of the work, it is answered later on in the work. This answer then in turn causes one to refer back to the beginning of the work. The same happens with the conclusion of the work in that it causes one to revisit this work from the beginning. In this respect, Meiklejohn’s argument resonates well when he qualifies the quality of Kant’s work:

The point of that epigram applied to many great achievements of the human spirit. The reader ... has to learn to rise to the height of the argument before he can understand what the author has to tell him; the greater the work of art, the harder that is.⁴²

Let us now study what Kant understood the Enlightenment to be. As earlier indicated, Kant’s argument is multilayered and each layer has to be understood by itself, as well as in the way it connects to the next layer.

Precursors: factors causing the need for Enlightenment

“Self-incurred tutelage”⁴³ is the reason for the need for Enlightenment. This tutelage is “man’s inability to make use of his understanding without the direction from another”.⁴⁴ According to Kant, it is not because man⁴⁵ lacks reason, but because of a “lack of resolution and courage to use it without the direction from another”.⁴⁶ In other words, man brought guardianship on himself and he handed his authority and instruction to someone else to decide for him. Thus, Kant clearly declares: “Have courage to use your own reason!”⁴⁷ This he calls the “motto”⁴⁸ of Enlightenment. Other scholars have phrased this motto as:

“Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!”⁴⁹

In order to understand Kant’s concern about the guardianship of man, it is necessary to look at the following arguments:

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Firstly, “nature has long since discharged man from external direction”.⁵⁰ In other words, guardianship, authority and instruction are all in the hands of every man. A man is a guardian of himself.

Secondly, Kant explicitly states that “laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind ... do remain under lifelong tutelage”.⁵¹ This self-incurred tutelage, by such a great portion of mankind, as a result of laziness and cowardice, takes place because man is not taking the authority that has long since been discharged from external direction by nature. By nature, every man has authority. But because man is lazy and is a coward, he brings tutelage on himself. Kant takes the argument further and states that this tutelage is not only self-imposed, but is also “lifelong”.⁵² As a result, it becomes “easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians”.⁵³

Thirdly, because others are now the guardians of men who are under tutelage of their own making, it is easy for the men under guardianship not to take responsibility for themselves. Kant states, “[i]t is so easy not to be of age”.⁵⁴ He further states the following as a reason of such men being under tutelage: “I need not think, if I can only pay – others will readily undertake the irksome work for me”.⁵⁵ He substantiates this with the following examples: “If I have a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, and so forth, I need not trouble myself.”⁵⁶

Fourthly, to quantify and justify this relationship of the guardian and the one under guardianship, both develop a rationale for this to remain so. This rationale is two way. On the one hand, the one under tutelage rationalises remaining in such a state. On the other hand, the one who is a guardian also develops his rationale to maintain his position. This results in dependence on the other for these positions to exist. For the people under tutelage, the step to competence “is held to be very dangerous”.⁵⁷ For those who have assumed guardianship over the “far greater portion of mankind” under tutelage, the step to competence is only perceived as “arduous”.⁵⁸ At this stage in his argument, Kant goes deeper to present a further analysis in which the guardians have now “assumed superintendence”⁵⁹ over the greater portion of mankind.

Fifthly, to qualify the nature of this superintendence, Kant introduces another concept: the domestication of the greater portion of mankind. He argues, “[a]fter the guardians have first made their domestic cattle dumb”⁶⁰ they “then show them the danger which threatens if they try to go alone”.⁶¹ At this stage, I would like to introduce my own concept to explain this danger. I call it “imagined danger”, because this danger does not exist per se, according to Kant. Kant explicitly states that: “Actually, however, this danger is not so great, for failing a few times, they will actually learn to walk alone.”⁶² In other words, one is released from self-incurred tutelage by beginning “to do it alone” – according to Kant.

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Lastly, after being domesticated, this greater portion of mankind is presented with imagined fear; they now live (and literally actualise) this fear by being “timid”.⁶³ This is the internalisation and actualisation of the imagined fear. Mankind is afraid to try and those who try are afraid to try further because “failure makes them timid and ordinarily frightens them away from all further trials”.⁶⁴ In other words, because this imagined fear is so deeply internalised, anyone who attempts to use his own reasoning by himself will stop himself after one or more failures. Consequently, the domesticated will once again need the guardians to superintend their lives.

Enlightenment for the individual: an “uncertain leap”

The nature of self-incurred tutelage is so complex a web that in order to free oneself from it one has to take an “uncertain leap”. According to Kant, it is important to understand what would necessitate this uncertain leap. Kant addresses the need for this uncertain leap on an individual level.

Firstly, Kant acknowledges that for any single individual to work himself out of the life under tutelage is very difficult. This is because this tutelage has become “almost his nature”.⁶⁵ Consequently, he has “come to be fond of this state”.⁶⁶ In this present state, “mankind is really incapable of making use of his reason”.⁶⁷ The reason why he is incapable of making use of his reason is because “no one has ever let him try it out”.⁶⁸ Thus, at this stage – for the individual – this tutelage has become perpetual and eternal.

Even more puzzling for mankind’s situation is what Kant calls the “fetters of an everlasting tutelage”.⁶⁹ These are tools presented to man under the guise of contributing to his enlightenment. Instead, these tools serve merely as “misemployment of his natural gifts”.⁷⁰ In other words, mankind is kept from his true release from the self-incurred tutelage by the false preoccupations. These fetters keep man from employing his natural gifts by doing the wrong things. They consume man’s time and energy and serve to fool man by making him think that he has employed his natural gifts in the right things. Consequentially, with the passing of time, his tutelage becomes everlasting. Kant states that these fetters of an everlasting tutelage come in the form of “statutes and formulas, those mechanical tools of the rational employment or rather misemployment of his natural gift, are the fetters of an everlasting tutelage”.⁷¹

Kant argues that anyone who throws off these fetters “makes only an uncertain leap over the narrowest ditch because he is not accustomed to that kind of free motion”.⁷² Throwing off these fetters is only possible by one’s “own exercise of mind”.⁷³ Kant qualifies the “exercise” of one’s mind; how can one be certain that one is exercising one’s own mind? Kant provides the following two indicators to prove that one has begun to exercise one’s own

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mind. Firstly, the exercise of the mind ought to free oneself from incompetence. Secondly, it should help one to achieve a steady pace.⁷⁴

At this stage in his manuscript, Kant moves the argument from the enlightenment of the individual to the enlightenment of the public. It is critical to note that Kant purposely starts his argument with the enlightenment of the individual. An individual would become key to assisting the public to be enlightened. In brief, it is not possible to speak of the enlightened public without speaking of the enlightened individual. The enlightening of the individual and of the public, both of which are still in process (in the period of Kant’s writing), define the “Age of Enlightenment”. We are not yet, according to Kant, in the “Enlightened Age” since the process is still unfolding.⁷⁵

Enlightenment for the public – “the great unthinking masses”: freedom and rational appreciation

There is a prerequisite for the public to be enlightened – “freedom”. Kant states, “if only freedom is granted, enlightenment is almost sure to follow”.⁷⁶ This existence of freedom creates an environment in which “some independent thinkers”⁷⁷ may also exist. (See earlier argument on the enlightenment of the individual.) Interestingly, Kant mentions that these independent thinkers may also be found “among the established guardians of the great masses”.⁷⁸ But these guardians can become independent thinkers “after throwing the yoke of tutelage”.⁷⁹ They will be able to “disseminate the spirit of the rational appreciation of both their own worth and every man’s vocation for thinking for himself”.⁸⁰

Here, we come across another twist in Kant’s argument. Kant never presented us with this twist earlier on in his work. This twist is that the guardians who are keeping the great masses of the people under tutelage are themselves also bound by the yoke of tutelage. As a result, they are unable to appreciate their own worth in their assumed role as guardians. By being able to appreciate their own worth, they allow every man to think for himself and thus when everyone thinks for themselves, no one will be the guardian of the other. In other words, to keep other people under tutelage also brings tutelage on yourself. As a result, you do not appreciate yourself either. To paraphrase: an oppressor causes oppression to himself as well.

However, there are some guardians “who are themselves capable of some enlightenment”.⁸¹ Unfortunately, these guardians are forced by the public to remain “bound”.⁸² However, the public is not doing this of its own will, but “is incited to do so by some guardians”.⁸³ These guardians are themselves “capable of some enlightenment – so harmful it is to implant prejudices, for they later take vengeance on their cultivators or on their descendants”.⁸⁴ Let us recall that it was the public that was first brought

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under this yoke by the guardians. In turn, the guardians are brought under this yoke by the public through the incitement of the fellow guardians. This becomes a complex web of contention between the guardians and those under tutelage.

Owing to the complexity of this web of contention, “the public can only slowly attain enlightenment”.⁸⁵ However, Kant warns that a revolution cannot ensure “a true reform in ways of thinking”.⁸⁶ The revolution is limited as it can only ensure the “fall of personal despotism or of avaricious or tyrannical oppression”.⁸⁷ This is because, according to Kant, a revolution does not reform the ways of thinking. Thus, since the ways of thinking are never reformed, the “new prejudices will serve as well as old ones to harness the great unthinking masses”.⁸⁸ Enlightenment, therefore, is more than the physical space of freedom. It also has to do with mental freedom: the rational appreciation of one’s worth whether as an individual or as the collective public.

Let us recall that, according to Kant, only when society is experiencing freedom can enlightenment truly take place. However, the environment of freedom, which is to the benefit of the public, is defined by Kant as “the freedom to make use of one’s reason at every point”.⁸⁹ In other words, reason knows no rest and cannot be in a state where it is not reasoning. For Kant, freedom and reason go together. Freedom is more than physical space; it also has to do with the mental space in which to make use of one’s reason at every point. Kant states, however, “[e]verywhere there is restriction of freedom”.⁹⁰ To develop this point, he provides the following examples:

But I hear on all sides, “Do not argue!” The officer says: “Do not argue but drill!” The tax collector: “Do not argue but pay!” The cleric: “Do not argue but believe!” Only one prince in the world says, “Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!”⁹¹

Postscript: Enlightenment – the debate continues

It is this restriction and related further arguments that Kant develops in his manuscript and which I hope to cover in further research. At this juncture, Kant, prolific in thought and provocative to the imagination, was to take on the question of public space and the relationship between restriction, enlightenment and the public space. Furthermore, he was to pay closer attention to enlightenment and religious matters. (Let us recall the earlier matter I introduced of the formal penitential struggle that Kant was to grapple with and also the contrast of a “religion of morality” and a “religion of ingratiating”.)

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This first article aims to cover Kant’s analysis of (a) causes necessitating the need for enlightenment; (b) enlightenment for the individual and its challenges; and (c) enlightenment for the public and its challenges. It is impossible to speak of enlightenment for the public without speaking of enlightenment for the individual. For the public to remain enlightened, individuals who keep making use of their reason at every point are needed. In brief, reason knows no rest.

To entice the reader to further argument, Kant was, for example, to develop his argument in detail by focusing on a religious organisation or institution as a case in point. When people belonging to a religious organisation were not allowed to question (by questioning they would be applying their thinking and reason), Kant believed that this was absolutely unacceptable. Such people would be making a period of time fruitless in the progress of mankind and would also be working to the disadvantage of generations to come. Kant succinctly presents this point:

But to unite in a permanent religious institution which is not to be subject to doubt before the public even in the lifetime of one man, and thereby to make a period of time fruitless in the progress of mankind towards improvement, thus working to the disadvantage of posterity – that is absolutely forbidden.⁹²

The implications of such an action are far reaching. Kant elaborates in this regard:

For himself (and only for a short time) a man can postpone enlightenment in what he ought to know, but to renounce it for himself, and even more to renounce it for posterity, is to injure and trample the rights of mankind.⁹³

Conclusion: a synthesis

Kant’s argument is inviting – both in depth and form. At the same time, a mastery of this argument needs constant study. To recap, Kant was arguing, in his time, that society is not in the “Enlightened Age” but was in the “Age of Enlightenment”. In other words, the process of enlightenment was still unfolding. This process was real and was what the individuals and society were battling with on a daily basis. This battle was for society and individuals to release themselves from self-incurred tutelage. However, this tutelage is a complex web and release from it is not as simple as it may seem.

Kant started his argument by affirmatively stating that society has long discharged man from external direction. Each man has to be his own guardian. However, owing to laziness and cowardice, the greater portion of

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mankind is under tutelage. This self-incurred tutelage becomes lifelong and, as a result, it becomes easy for others to set themselves up as guardians of the greater portion of mankind. This becomes the reason for the existence of guardians and the practice of guardianship. In turn, the greater majority of mankind uses the existence of guardians as the reason for them not to take responsibility for their own lives. The development of the rationale, and the justification for the relationship that now prevails between the guardians and the greater majority of mankind, takes place on both sides. To further maintain and justify their position, the guardians develop ways of domesticating the greater public and creating imagined fear. These are the contextual factors within which the enlightenment has to take place.

For Kant, the two notions, “Age of Enlightenment” and “Enlightened Age” are not the same. The society of his time was still undergoing the “Age of Enlightenment”. The majority of the individuals and the public have not yet reached the “Enlightened Age”, as they are still under tutelage that is self-imposed.

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Endnotes

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- 1 Königsberg, the city, was founded in the year of Kant’s birth. This city lay on the north-eastern border of the German-speaking world. It was founded as a result of the combining of the three cities, Altstadt, Löbenicht and Kneiphof (Höffe, O 1992. *Immanuel Kant*. New York: State University of New York, p 9).
- 2 Hyland, P, Gomez, O & Greensides, F 2003. *The Enlightenment: a sourcebook and reader*. USA: Routledge, p 53.
- 3 His father’s full names were Johan Georg Kant (See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 12).
- 4 Höffe, O 1992. *Immanuel Kant*. New York: State University of New York, p 9.
- 5 This school was also called Friedrichs-Gymnasium. It had a strict religious regimen, and as a result the local population called it the Pietists’ Inn. The religious instruction and church services made up a significant portion of the curriculum. Hebrew and Greek were taught with the aid of the Old and New Testaments. Mathematical sciences played a minor role. “Only Latin, which attracts Kant’s sustained interest, appears to have been taught well” (Höffe, O *Op cit*, p 10).
- 6 Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 13.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Albert Schultz was the student of the German Enlightenment philosopher Christian Wolff.
- 9 See earlier discussion.
- 10 This is the third name of the same institution. Therefore, the following three names refer to one and the same institution that Kant attended: Collegium Friedericianum, Friedrichskollegium and Friedrichs-Gymnasium.
- 11 See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 13. Also read Haden pp 14–16 for a feel of the inside workings of this school. In brief, this school had great shortcomings for Kant. (See also earlier discussion by Höffe.)
- 12 Höffe, O 1992. *Immanuel Kant*. New York: State University of New York, p 10.
- 13 See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 16.
- 14 For an interesting discussion on this aspect, see Haden, J. 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, pp 16–18.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 To this, Meiklejohn adds, “[Kant] thought that as Newton had been the first thoroughly to set forth the laws and principles of the natural sciences, so Rousseau has been the first to discover the principles of conduct”. (See Meiklejohn, JMD 1984. *Immanuel Kant: critique of pure reason*. Great Britain: Guernsey Press, p xi).
- 17 See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 25.
- 18 Ibid., pp 25–26.
- 19 Ibid., pp 23–24.
- 20 Höffe, O. *Op. cit.*, p 9.
- 21 Haden, in his work, helps us locate the minister’s place of residence. In the works I consulted, he is the only one who gives the characters and names of the places where the history of Kant’s life unfolded. (See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 32).
- 22 Again, Haden’s work comes through in its preciseness of location. (See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 33).
- 23 Höffe, O. *Op. cit.*, p 9.
- 24 Again, Haden’s work comes through for preciseness of location. (Haden, J. 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, p 33).
- 25 See Haden, J 1981. *Kant’s life and thought*. USA: Edwards Brothers, pp 32–33. Haden presents his argument by quoting Christian Jacob Kraus, “since it was Kraus who took over the post of private tutor and master in the Keyserling home in Königsberg following the marriage of Countess Keyserling to her second cousin Heinrich Christian Keyserling” (ibid., p 33).
- 26 Höffe, O. *Op. cit.*, p 11.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 His arguments were to be later confirmed by the astronomer Herschel (1738–1822). (See Höffe, O. *Op. cit.*, pp 10–12.)
- 30 Höffe, O 1992. *Immanuel Kant*. New York: State University of New York, p 12. Let us note that Kant was to follow his first work on research: *Critique of pure reason* (1781) with *Critique of practical reason* (1788).

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- 31 See Höffe, O. *Op. cit.*, p 13.
- 32 Ibid., pp 13–14
- 33 Ibid., p 15
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 See Hyland, P, Gomez, O & Greensides, F 2003. *The Enlightenment: a sourcebook and reader*. USA: Routledge, p 53.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 This work was necessitated by a problem he was attempting to resolve in a letter to Marcus Herz in 1772. The first edition of this work was produced in 1781. “The reception of the first edition evidently confirmed Kant’s misgivings. For he found several of his critics ascribed to him a doctrine of subjective idealism with which he had no sympathy. He strove to correct this misunderstanding in a small work entitled *Prolegomena to any future metaphysic which may pretend to be scientific*, which he published in 1783, and in the changes of this second edition of the *Critique of pure reason*, which he published in 1787” (see Meiklejohn, *Op. cit.*, p vii). Meiklejohn further adds that the second edition is a realist interpretation of Kant as an idealist (Ibid., p viii.).
- 38 It is important to note how the argument connects these three important works of Kant. For example, let us note that in the first edition (1781) of *Critique of pure reason*, Kant comes across as an idealist. Then, in the second edition (1787) of the same work, he comes across as a realist. “For example, when he wrote the *Critique of judgement* in 1790 he had changed his mind as to there being a priori principles involved in the aesthetics; when he wrote the first edition of the *Critique [of reason]* he thought there were none” (Ibid).
- 39 See Hyland, P, Gomez, O & Greensides, F 2003. *The Enlightenment: a sourcebook and reader*. USA: Routledge, p 54.
- 40 See earlier discussion.
- 41 The delineated subheadings are not going to be the structure around which I will construct this article.
- 42 See Meiklejohn, *Op. cit.*, p x. Let us note that Meiklejohn wrote this statement to appraise the following work of Kant: *Critique of pure reason*. Notwithstanding, this appraisal does also fit our current focus of Kant’s work: *What is Enlightenment?*
- 43 Kramnick, I (ed.) 1995. *The portable Enlightenment reader*. England: Penguin Books, p 1.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 The use of “man” in this article is not meant to exclude women from this discourse. Rather, “man” is used as a gender inclusive term to refer to human beings. To consciously use the term “man”, as used by Kant, in this article, it is to stay as close as possible to the original translation and the actual words used by Kant.
- 46 Kramnick, I (ed.) *Op. cit.*, p 1
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 See Hyland, et al. *Op. cit.*, p 54. This formulation was derived from the Roman poet Horace.
- 50 Kramnick, I (ed.) *Op. cit.*, p 1
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid., p 1.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid., p 2.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.

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- 69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Somewhere in our scholarly endeavours, we may need to invoke this argument for our current period.
76 Kramnick, I (ed.) *Op. cit.*, p 2
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p 3
91 Ibid., pp 2–3
92 Ibid., p 5
93 Ibid.