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Criticism in the Enlightenment

Perspectives on Koselleck's Kritik und Krise Study

Professor Reinhart Koselleck's early work *Kritik und Krise* ranks among the classics in the history of Western thought. This study, first published in 1959, is based on his dissertation presented at Heidelberg (1954), and several German editions have later been issued. It has been translated into Spanish, Italian, French, and finally, in 1988, into English. How can interest in the study be explained? Does this shortly 40-year-old study still have something to offer to modern research on the Enlightenment, or is it primarily interesting purely from the point of view of the historiography of history?

Kritik und Krise is a study concerning the European Enlightenment and its origins. It essentially concentrates only on the time from the end of the religious wars to the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 and analyses the ideas of key figures and lesser-known German, English, and French thinkers of the time. Its main themes are the emergence of the great innovation of the "century of critique", the public sphere maintained by private citizens and the explicit and implicit functions of public opinion. Yet as the subtitle *Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt (Enlighten-*

ment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society) and the *Introduction* indicate, the specific perspective in the study centres around the relationship between the past and present. The author seems to regard both the inability of men and societies to resolve the contradiction between morality and politics and the inability of people to transform their crisis-consciousness into rational political action, instead of escaping their difficulties to a Utopia, as the ‘malady’ of the modern world. The inability to face realities and the competition between sharply differing Utopian philosophies of history weaken the chances of dealing with problems in a peaceful manner and pave the way to catastrophes. In the first editions of *Kritik und Krise* Koselleck linked his dark insights into the status of the modern world to the Cold War, the seemingly irreconcilable ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, the threat of nuclear war, and the tensions following emancipation development in the Third World (Koselleck 1973, ix ff., 1f.). Later, the author has admitted that a great German dilemma motivated his research by announcing that one of the initial purposes was to research the historical pre-conditions of National Socialism (Koselleck 1988, 1). He thus traces the roots of modern ‘sickness’ to the Enlightenment. Due to this, and despite the fact that it is mainly the reader’s responsibility to draw conclusions regarding the impact of the Enlightenment on the present, this study can be characterized along the same lines as Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung*; i.e. as a work, which studies the limitations and weaknesses of Enlightenment thought and which, from a larger perspective, can be considered a pessimistic critique of Western rationality and its belief in progress.

“Put in a nutshell, this book attempts to offer a genetic theory of the modern world”; these were Koselleck’s own words in the 1988 preface of *Kritik und Krise*. At that time he himself considered that the book’s chief strength was that he had been attempting to find the roots of 20th century Utopianism in the Enlightenment and to create an ideal-typical framework for the development of world history from the French Revolution onwards as the most significant aspects of his work (Koselleck 1988, 1ff.; citation p. 4). This way of posing questions based on the problems of the present has been among the major reasons why *Kritik und Krise* has attracted a

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great deal of attention, although this has given cause for criticism as well. Doubts have even circulated around the issue of whether this book can be considered actual historiography. According to an early cutting review it does not deal with the Enlightenment but is rather an assessment of the present through the philosophy of history, which relies on its author's learning in the field of history.¹ This type of evaluation is, of course, unreasonably one-sided and does not comply with Koselleck's intentions, yet it most likely includes hidden doubts shared by many historians that research essentially dominated by present interests, or of which the primary starting point is disappointment with the results of modernization, often reduce the view of the past and rarely do justice to their subject. Therefore, when considering the significance of Koselleck's study on the origins of the modern world's malady, a key issue is how relevant we can consider his interpretation of the Enlightenment on the basis of current research.

Koselleck's understanding of the Enlightenment is based on his theory concerning the origins of Absolutism, which takes Hobbes' Leviathan as its starting point. Carl Schmitt, a former critic of Liberalism and Parliamentarism, has also influenced this theory with his interpretations of Hobbes and the genesis of the modern state.² Absolutism, as interpreted by Koselleck, became the means by which society was pacified in the historical situation of the religious civil wars. A precondition for this was the firm separation of politics from morality and the subordination of morality to politics: politics was separated off as the sovereign's own sphere, which existed outside religious and confessional quarrels and in which norms greatly differing from private morals, the demands of the *raison d'état*, were applied. In order to achieve societal peace, ordinary citizens were pushed out of the sphere of politics. They were left with the private sphere, in which the individual had a free conscience in issues of religion and morals. This separation also meant that the individual was on the one hand a subject lacking political power and the right to criticize the sovereign, while on the other he was a human being with free will and power to make decisions in the sphere of morality. The dualism of politics and morals created by Absolutism is, according to Koselleck, a precondition for the Enlightenment and its criticism and, as a matter of fact, included the seeds of destruction for

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Absolutism. As secularization progressed, the subjects – especially the new bourgeois elite – shifted their focus away from religious questions of conscience and turned to presenting moral evaluations, i.e. criticism of earthly matters (Koselleck 1973, 11ff., 41ff.).

When analysing the development of the concept of criticism and the gradual broadening of the targets of this criticism in the “Republic of Letters” in the 18th century and the organizations of the Enlightenment, the author provides interesting perspectives on much discussed problems, which concern the birth processes of a civic society, especially the origins of public opinion, new types of civic organizations, and hidden politicization during the Enlightenment. According to Koselleck, the essential feature of the Enlightenment is the development that enabled the enlargement of the private inner sphere left for the subjects and extended itself into the sphere of politics dominated by the government. This situation was at hand when critics began to express their opinions of laws. Criticism and its “tribunal of reason” developed into an indirect, cloaked political power within the state, for which the Enlightenment philosophers demanded sovereignty and which eventually also developed into an actual authority, “the Fourth Estate”.(Koselleck 1973, 41ff., 94f.)

Unlike Jürgen Habermas, for example, who has described the origins of a “bourgeois public sphere” in the 18th century from a neo-Marxist perspective in a rather positive manner as an emancipating and progressive force destroying the structures of late feudalistic society (see Habermas 1962/1974), and many scholars who have considered the public opinion of the Enlightenment as the beginning of the democratization processes of the modern world (e.g. Jacob 1994, 108f.), Koselleck raises pronouncedly issues which he regards as the dangerous and self-deceiving sides of bourgeois emancipation in the Enlightenment. According to his central thesis, criticism had a built-in mechanism of crisis provocation, even though eighteenth-century people failed to recognize it. In the Enlightenment, criticism was understood as a process, continuous dialogue, in which an essential part of a subject was the argumentation for and against in order to discover the incontrovertible truth in the future. This seemingly innocent starting point made critics believe unrealistically in their own neutrality and provided all of them with an absolute

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freedom to present their opinions in public. In Koselleck's opinion, this was a way of smuggling the *bellum omnium contra omnes* back into the society – although in the form of a spiritual battle at this time (Koselleck 1973, 81ff., 90ff.). During the generation of Enlighteners following Voltaire's criticism – for reasons, which the author does not explain very thoroughly – lost its process nature, attained a demand for supremacy with tyrannical features, and attempts were made to monopolize the truth as the property of only one side, that of the Enlightenment philosophers (Koselleck 1973, 98ff.).

In Koselleck's interpretation criticism in the Enlightenment, despite all the appeals to morals, reason and nature, was fundamentally political criticism turning particularly against absolute government. He considers as essential and relating to the pathogenesis of the modern world the fact that the proponents of the Enlightenment could not or did not want to be aware of the political nature of the Enlightenment process. They regarded themselves as apolitical and wanted to avoid all conflicts with the Absolutist system. This changed criticism into hypocrisy, drove the Enlightenment into Utopia, and more and more certainly into crises. One essential means of cloaking with which eighteenth-century actors, according to Koselleck, tried intellectually to avoid confrontation with Absolutism, was connected with the philosophy of progress and orientation for the future. This was seen not only in the numerous predictions of revolutions and crises in the latter half of the 18th century, but especially in the fact that the Enlightenment thinkers themselves engaged in planning the future by developing Utopian philosophies of history. According to these thought constructions firmly anchored in the belief in progress, the faults at hand did not necessarily demand the subjects' concrete involvement in the present since the problems would inevitably be resolved in the future positively and without violence – and just like the creators of these philosophies had anticipated them being resolved. Philosophies of history on the one hand act as tools of self-deception; on the other hand they act as indirect political powers, because they, of course, invertedly include a judgement upon the existing political and social conditions (Koselleck 1973, 105ff.).

In fact Koselleck builds the Enlightenment into a process, which

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– in spite of the intentions of contemporaries – leads to the French Revolution, and he wants to offer an answer to the classic question discussed even by Tocqueville of why the Enlighteners, who had engaged in severe criticism of the political and societal system, do not seem to have understood the potentially revolutionary conclusions of their own ideals. According to Tocqueville’s famous reply, the tendency to engage in abstract radical thinking was caused by the inexperience of Enlightenment philosophers and the high nobility in practical politics during the Absolutist system (Tocqueville 1856/1988, 229ff.). Koselleck, on the other hand, constructs his explanation on the lack of political consciousness described above: remaining attached to this very nonpolitical self-image was fatal for self-understanding and understanding of reality for the Enlighteners, because it only broadened the conflict between morals and politics, between society and state, prevented rational political action, and deprived the people of the Enlightenment of the ability to put their own certainties of faith into relative terms. The more the political nature of problems was concealed or was covered up intentionally, the deeper the crisis. Koselleck perceives this mechanism as leading to the destruction of Absolutism in the French Revolution and to the permanent state of crises predicted by Rousseau and to the era of revolutions; that is, to the modern world. Koselleck links the road to terror during the French Revolution to those demands for truth and supremacy, which he believes have dominated the criticism of the Enlightenment and public opinion at the end of the 18th century, and which he largely seems to substitute with Rousseau’s idea of *volonté générale*. He gives the Genevan in other respects as well a significant role in his theory on the genesis of the modern world by joining with those exegetes, in whose opinion the ideals of “total democracy” in *Contrat social* and the general will include the basis for later ideas of dictatorship and totalitarianism (Cf. Koselleck 1973, 132ff., 137, 138).

Critique and Crises is a fascinating interpretation. Its aspect relating to the malady of the modern world is unlikely to have lost significance at the end of the 20th century, in an atmosphere influenced considerably by the citizens’ programmatic “non-politicality” due to their weariness of politics. Furthermore, Koselleck’s work may interest postmodernists, who have long

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discussed the failure of the “Enlightenment project” and the weaknesses of Western rationalism. Yet, as a description of its actual topic, 18th-century ideas, the study is somewhat problematic in some respects. Above all, the understanding of the Enlightenment forming the basis of the research is controversial. It is clearly based upon the old conception of France as the ideal-typical model nation for the European Enlightenment and on the radicalization of the Enlightenment from one generation to another with the French Revolution at the end of this continuation. The foundations of this type of understanding of the Enlightenment were, as a matter of fact, created during the French Revolution, when, on the one hand, the revolutionaries declared themselves the executors of the will of the Enlightenment, on the other hand, Augustin Barruel and many other anti-revolutionaries bothered by conspiracy hysteria started to accuse the Enlightenment of beginning the Revolution and its terror. In more rational versions, the idea of the development of France as a crystallization of the Enlightenment and of the Enlightenment as the cause of the Revolution has long existed in historiography. However, it is evident that this type of idea includes the supposition of unity in the Enlightenment, is easily susceptible to criticism and is clearly too narrow and deterministic to describe the Enlightenment and its significance for modernization.

According to the pluralistic views nowadays increasingly gaining support, the Enlightenment should be viewed as a far-embracing complex of ideas, for which the common multinational fundamental tendencies were rationality, criticality, secularization, and reformism evident in all areas of life but which obtained original features in each country’s special circumstances. The Enlightenment was, without a doubt, an ideology of changes, but its goals were reforms, not a revolution. France, the only country to have a revolution in the 18th century, is thus more of an exception than a model of the potential effects of the Enlightenment. The gradual radicalization of the Enlightenment was merely one, and not even the most dominant, feature of it. The gradual politicization of the Enlightenment is more essential in this respect, of which – as Koselleck emphasizes – most of the enlightened men were not really distinctly conscious. Other crucial features were the easily noticeable expansion of Enlighten-

ment culture that, in the last decades of the 18th century, within the Central European countries embraced already quite large portions of society's middle and upper strata, and the division of the Enlightenment into numerous unpolitical and political, moderate, radical, and even more or less conservative movements drawing its main explanation from the strong growth in the support for the Enlightenment (e.g. Möller 1986, esp. 19ff., 36ff., 298ff. Gumbrecht/Reichardt/Schleich 1981, 3ff.).

The diversity of opinions makes the old interpretation of the universal, naive belief in progress in the Enlightenment vulnerable, on which Koselleck seems to base his thesis of the Enlighteners escaping into Utopian philosophies of history. In reality, many of the Enlighteners perceived history as a continuous struggle between the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment, in which even small progress achieved was always seen to be in danger and in need of protection (e.g. Hinske 1981, lviii ff.). The pluralistic understanding of the Enlightenment forces us also to put Koselleck's view that the key issue in the Enlightenment had been hidden and partly open opposition to Absolutism into relative terms. Analysing the issue objectively, it seems self-evident that the Enlightenment and Absolutism were in their essential goals in contrast with one another. As is well known, particularly in the French Enlightenment the criticism of Absolutism started to emerge rather visibly from the mid-18th century onwards, as the problems of state finances and tax reform quarrels worsened. There is also no denying the fact that public criticism and public opinion were perhaps even unintentionally, phenomena which called Absolutism into question, since, according to the old theory of Absolutism, only the sovereign was a public figure and a representative of common good, whereas the subjects were understood to be merely supporting particular interests (Baker 1990, 169). It is also clear that both the monarchs as well as other rulers often felt public opinion to be a threat to them, which is why criticism in the Enlightenment often had to resort to different detours or became shallow due to self-censorship.

On the other hand, the eighteenth-century consciousness – which, of course, cannot be freely dismissed when studying the functions of Enlightenment thought – also reveals features favourable

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to Absolutism and sides, which merit the conclusion that a considerable number of the Enlighteners failed to consider Absolutism the most urgent problem of the time. They rather understood as their real enemies many other phenomena upholding traditionalism; such as the Church, religious orthodoxy, the privileges of the nobility, the faults of the judicial system, outdated educational systems, or old-fashioned mentalities. When discussing the relationship between criticism in the Enlightenment and Absolutism, the fact that the new “bourgeois publicity” was not seeking battle rather than dialogue with the rulers ought to be considered. Public opinion wanted to appeal to and persuade the rulers and thus influence the handling of common matters. Especially in the countries of Absolutism, public citizens’ discourse became a sort of a substitute for missing political rights. Even the social history of the Enlightenment casts doubt on the view of the Enlightenment as a real counterforce to Absolutism. Not only on the periphery of Europe but also at the core, the supporters of the Enlightenment were mainly officials, teachers, and others employed by the State, or intelligentsia dependent on the rulers’ favour. Therefore, they were more likely to identify themselves as partners of the State than as its opponents.

Absolutism also gained advocates of various degrees of activity in the Enlightenment. In France many of the physiocrats supported Enlightened Absolutism, and, for the German Enlightenment, it was outright typical to be willing to compromise with Absolutism and to possess great optimism at least until the 1780s for the chances of Enlightened Absolutism and “the princely revolution”. The Enlightenment aimed on a wide front at demolishing the old structures that were felt to be irrational, yet Absolutism, at least its Enlightened version, could not necessarily be equated with traditionalism. Reform programs of enlightened Absolutism facilitated in many Enlighteners’ opinion and partly in practice the general reform goals of the Enlightenment were able to promote a certain degree of modernization. Thanks to this, belief in the gradual reformation of Absolutism was not impossible.

It is also rather uncertain whether the numerous debates of the Enlightenment on the natural and inalienable rights of people, freedom, or the mutual superiority of the form of government can be reduced

primarily to an opposition to Absolutism in the continental Enlightenment before the year 1789, as we have traditionally become used to think. It is worth considering whether these include more essentially demands for – not political but – greater civil rights and so-called equality of opportunities. For example on the Continent, anglophilia, which many researchers have perceived as an expression of anti-Absolutism and concealed Constitutionalism, turns out at least in the case of Germany after a closer look to be mainly admiration for the British freedom of expression, protection of law, and the possibilities of social ascendancy, and the whole discussion of “British freedom” begins to accentuate towards evaluations of the political system only in the politicized atmosphere created by the French Revolution. Even then, the subject in the comparisons did not primarily centre around Absolutism but the new Constitution of France (Haikala 1985; cf. Maurer 1987).

Kritik und Krise contains such methodological statements and interesting conceptual analysis which anticipate Koselleck’s later orientation towards the development of methodology for conceptual history. Especially in the footnotes to the study, the author deals with the history of several concepts and their content in a way which is familiar to the readers of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.³ Furthermore, the study is linked with later conceptual history, for example, through the view that in the framing of research questions known philosophers and anonymous pamphlets are considered of equal value as sources, and in the intention expressed in the *Introduction* to link the methods of *Geistesgeschichte* to analysis of sociological conditions (Koselleck 1973, 4, 5). Due to its practical solutions, however, the study still represents rather traditional history of ideas. The deductions on what is dominant and typical in Enlightenment thinking mostly rest on a few known Enlightenment thinkers. This, of course, is problematic from the point of view of generalizations on the results, although the notes do include quite a few examples of such statements of lesser-known writers which are almost parallel to the quoted thoughts of the great philosophers.

Kritik und Krise has also been criticized of ignoring the social and political context of the thought. The work has thus been viewed as describing more the Enlightenment thinking’s potential than the

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actual social and political functions. (Voges 1987, 15ff.) The justification of this criticism cannot wholly be denied, since the criticism of the Enlightenment and such phenomena indicating crisis, which started to strengthen during the last quarter century in European centres, is hardly possible to explain thoroughly by ignoring the concrete situations or by not placing the thinking in the relevant framework of socio-economic change, political development, growth in counter-Enlightenment forces, and a deepening crisis in norms.

One obvious shortcoming in Koselleck's study is the little attention directed towards the fact that also the counterforces influenced the problems of the Enlightenment and its failures, and that, due to mutually competing ideologies, these attempts at monopolizing the truth remained mere attempts in the public sphere. An approach centring around the dialogue or a conscious aspiration to research the differences in thinking, conflicts, and controversy – characteristics of later conceptual history – could have perhaps even in this case perceived the differences in the societal meanings and confrontations in Enlightenment thought better than the methods of the traditional history of ideas. At the same time, they could possibly have decreased the danger of being excessively abstract in the study of the history of ideas.

The great theory in *Kritik und Krise* on the dead-ends of Enlightenment thought remains somewhat inadequately justified, and the study cannot without reservations be considered a universal description of the nature of the Enlightenment, of its hidden meanings, or its consequences. However, the merits of the book are indisputable. These include, among other things, inspiring analysis of the thinking of European Enlightenment thinkers, including many new perspectives, and perhaps above all the thematization of many interesting research issues.

Koselleck has problematised in particular the question of public and secret sphere dialectics, as well as the significance of the new "sociability" and Freemasonry in *Kritik und Krise* in a way that has been influential in later research. Intensive research into Enlightenment organizations has been taking place in historiography for quite a while. In it, a great deal of attention has been directed towards secret societies and especially to Freemasonry, the most popular

organization. A considerable problem is still the question discussed by Koselleck: why did secrets and secret societies become popular in a culture which otherwise fought for the freedom of the press and the principle of publicity and in which public debate became a new important way of influencing politics.

Koselleck is not interested in the esoteric teachings of the Freemasons, Illuminates, and other secret societies apart from the social functions within the arcanum sphere created by them, which he perceives as crystallizing the dialectics of morals and politics in the Enlightenment. Freemasonry he interprets as being a civic society formed in the internal emigration within a state. Within this civic society different laws to those existing in a state or the official society of *ancien régime* applied, because in the Masonic ideology principles typical of rational Enlightenment, such as the mutual equality of the members and freedom, the aspiration to moral self-improvement, and tolerance were emphasized. Masonic secrets he regards as protection against the State and also the established Church. According to Koselleck, Freemasons explicitly rejected politics – political and religious debates were even forbidden in the rules, yet despite this, or maybe more correctly because of it, Freemasonry was an indirect political power turning against Absolutism. This was for the very reason that the separation from the state and stress on virtue indirectly emphasized the fact that the State and the existing hierarchy within the society were suffering a deficiency in morals (Koselleck 1973, 49ff., 61ff., 68ff.).

When it comes to the remarkably persistent allegations even in research from the end of the 18th century to the Second World War of the Freemasons' revolutionary character and secret influence on the beginning of the French Revolution, it should be stressed that Koselleck is not of one of these conspiracy theoreticians, even though some of his secondary sources are of this nature. Freemasonry is for him, like the public sphere, an institution of indirect political power. In his evaluations of the connections between French Freemasonry, the Revolution and Jacobinism, he seems to be cautiously nearing Augustin Cochin, who was recently 'rehabilitated' by François Furet. Cochin also considered the Enlightenment organizations as secret ideological forces undermining the legitimacy of the *ancien régime*.

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To him, Freemasonry, although the members were not conspirators, was part of the mechanism of politicization leading to the Revolution (Furet 1978/1988, 257ff.; cf. Koselleck 1973, 64f., 187f.).

Especially in German research into Freemasonry, the questions posed by Koselleck have been repeatedly utilized directly or indirectly, and he has rightly been credited with the fact that the history of Freemasonry cannot any longer be characterized as being pre-occupied with curiosities rather than as an essential part of research on the culture of the Enlightenment. The work of the last decades has produced an abundance of new, more reliable information on the lodges and their members, but we have become less certain than before of, for example, the ideological aspects of Freemasonry, which is why in recent research the emphasis differs somewhat from the interpretations in *Kritik und Krise*. Koselleck's thesis of the indirect political significance of the Freemasons and Illuminates has not been disproved, but his views on the anti-Absolutism of Freemasonry – that, in many countries, found support even among the princes and the court – need revision. Newer research also does not present the German Illuminates, a secret society representing radical Enlightenment, as political or dangerous to the *ancien régime* as was common in the 1950s research situation (see especially Agethen 1984). All in all, the researchers' focus has shifted from questioning Absolutism towards another direction indicated by Koselleck; that is, the sociability of the Enlightenment and the phenomena anticipating the creation of a new political culture as well as questions relating to the significance of the secret societies in the formation of a new societal mentality, new elite, and a civic society. On the other hand, more and more attention has been paid to the fact that 18th-century Freemasonry cannot without residuals be substituted with the rational Enlightenment: its esoteric teachings right from the start included not only rational but irrational elements, and many kinds of mystical, newly religious, and alchemistic ideas found their home in the Masonic and Paramasonic organizations.

As concerns research on public opinion during the Enlightenment, *Kritik und Krise*, in addition to Jürgen Habermas' slightly more recent piece of research *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit (Transformation of the Public Sphere)*, is one of the basic works on the

subject. Of particular value in it is bringing the theme of non-politicality and “non-political politicization” into the foreground. In the publicity of the Enlightenment, the naive and uncritical beliefs of the contemporaries, that they were the mouthpieces of truth and disinterested caretakers of humanity as a whole, were undoubtedly conspicuous. The reasons for these delusions of neutrality can probably be found in many sources. Partly this must have been influenced by the traditional dislike for “politicking” of all kinds, and towards both confessional and political party groups which were substituted in the eighteenth-century understanding usually with fanaticism and egoistic, particular interest-seeking (cf. e.g. Sellin 1974, esp. 827f., 842; Beyme 1974, 687ff.). The overt optimism typical of the Enlightenment as to the ability of human reason to reach objective truths, and the understanding of public opinion as indicating the will of the people (or more likely of its most Enlightened part) and representing the common good also had a similar influence (e.g. Baker 1990, 196ff.). Recent research into the rise of professionalism has also opened up interesting perspectives on the matter. One reason for the belief in impartiality was probably the fact that the Enlighteners, who were mostly the educated bourgeois or academically educated nobles, regarded themselves as the meritocratic elite of the society and considered that education had made them experts and bearers of objective knowledge (La Vopa 1992, 110ff.). However, Koselleck’s explanation linking criticism to the sphere of morality may actually have considerable relevance. Also, it is hard to dispute the justification of Koselleck’s interpretation that the criticism of the Enlightenment often displayed the tendencies to monopolize the truth and show intolerance towards those holding different opinions.

As a matter of fact, Koselleck’s theory of the key role of moral argumentation, unrealistic thinking and the difficulty of allowing the right of existence to competing trains of thought may offer at least partial explanations for many of the special features of the Enlightenment era. One of these could be to explain the political problems by means of the conspiracy theses, which became more common in the 18th century. The most famous of the conspiracy theories is the thesis developed by counter-revolutionary alarmists during the French Revolution claiming that the Enlightenment Philosophers, Freemasons,

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Illuminates, and the Jacobins were joining forces in a conspiracy aimed at a world revolution. One could argue that this thought structure has changed into the malady of the modern world, because the same basic logic has been repeated in numerous later conspiracy theories; the groups labelled as the enemies of society changed to include among others Jews, Liberals, Socialists and Communists (Bieberstein 1976). However it is to be noted that during the 18th century also the revolutionaries and the sworn proponents of the Enlightenment both in Europe and in America developed their own conspiracy theses. One example of this are the claims of a crypto-Catholic conspiracy which aroused great controversy in Germany in the 1780s; claims which were first presented in public by the well-known advocates of the Enlightenment in Berlin: J. E. Biester, Friedrich Gedike, and Friedrich Nicolai. Basically, the matter relates to the Enlighteners' inability to process problems politically, that is, to understand the strengthening of different counter-Enlightenment movements. The dispute quickly developed into a propaganda war between the supporters of the Enlightenment and its critics, in which the opposing side also resorted to the conspiracy thesis by accusing the Enlighteners of a deist conspiracy.⁴ Conspiracy theories, in which the explanation for the misfortunes of the world are always reduced to a person's will and intentional actions, benefited from the secularized ideas of the Enlightenment that history can be made by men and that events in the world can be explained by men. Their logic was of course substantially entangled with moral questions and they, in the words of Gordon S. Wood, "represented an effort, perhaps in retrospect a last desperate effort, to hold men personally and morally responsible for their actions" (Wood 1982, 411).

As a whole, *Kritik und Krise* has not attained the status of a classic due to the fact that its author has later become a famous developer and greatly respected researcher of conceptual history, and its significance is not limited to the study being an interesting example of Cold War historiography. The seemingly durable contribution to research of this almost 40-year-old book can be found in the extremely fruitful research questions and fascinating interpretations which, in spite of the criticism raised, have offered plenty of stimuli and challenges for later research.

Notes

- ¹ This was Helmut Kohn's review of *Kritik und Krise*, in *Historische Zeitschrift* 1961, vol. 192, p. 666.
- ² See Koselleck 1973, 18ff., 166 (notes 65,68,70), cf. p. xii; Schmitt 1938/1982, esp. 85ff.. For Schmitt's influence on Koselleck see also Popkin 1991, 82f..
- ³ See for example in: Koselleck 1988 the words 'politics' p. 42 fn. 5; 'critique' and 'crisis' p. 103f. fn. 15; 'revolution' p. 160f. fn. 6.
- ⁴ Haikala 1996, 54 ff.. – Koselleck as a matter of fact analyses one of the key works surrounding this controversy, E. A.A. von Göchhausen's *Ent-hüllung des Systems der Weltbürger-Republik*, but links it, exposing himself to criticism, to Illuminates: see Koselleck 1973, 113f..

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