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Foreword: The Values of the Enlightenment

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The values of the Enlightenment have become firmly embedded in European culture. In today's world, who would criticize values such as science, critical thinking and rationality, or the preference for critical thinking over irrational attitudes that are accepted without intersubjective justification? We live in a world where scientific and technological progress fundamentally influences the way the world is shaped. Can we imagine life without the refinements made possible by science and technology? These are just a few examples of values typical of the Enlightenment. We live by and defend these values, even if we reject the extremes of the Enlightenment.[1] Following the tragic events of the 20th century, we are well aware that rationality can coexist with moral degeneration and decline. Horkheimer and

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[1] Cf. Leszek Kopciuch, „Aktualność Oświecenia według Stevena Pinkera (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem idei postępu)," *Humaniora. Czasopismo internetowe*, vol. 43, no 3 (2023), 11–25, https://doi.org/10.14746/h2023.3.1

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Adorno's analyses have taught us that rationality can also fall into crisis and deviate fundamentally from its legitimate meaning.[2] In light of climate change and the transformations of our natural environment caused by human technical and economic activity, we can no longer view scientific and technical progress uncritically. However, this does not mean that we reject the values of the Enlightenment. Rather, we want to adopt an Enlightenment attitude towards them: a critical one.

Examples of different perspectives on Enlightenment values can be found in the analyses published in the thematic section of the current issue of *Culture and Values*. These texts are based on papers presented at the conference "The Significance of the Philosophy of Enlightenment for European Culture," held in Lublin last December.[3]

In *An Expansive View of Truth and a Non-Pessimistic Conception of Human Nature: The Form and Content of Enlightenment Philosophy*, Francesco Allegri (Pegaso University of Naples) argues that the Enlightenment can be characterized by two ideas: an expansive understanding of truth and a non-pessimistic view of human nature. He believes that it is these two ideas that essentially differentiate the Enlightenment from libertinism.

The next paper is dedicated to Christian Wolff. Dino Jakušić (University of Warwick) analyses Wolff's philosophy in the context of his understanding of philosophical freedom (*libertas philosophandi).* Jakušić distinguishes between negative and positive freedom, arguing that both can be found in Wolff. Negative freedom appears as independence in philosophical thinking. Positive freedom, on the other hand, appears as epistemic autonomy.

In the article *How Could Kant's Distinction Between Opinion, Belief, and Knowledge Address the Epistemic Challenges of the Digital Age?*, Tailine Hijaz (Federal University of Paraná, and University of Vechta) asks how Kant's critical

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[2] Cf. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947); in English: *Dialectic of Entlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noer (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002). Cf. also Eric Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, ed. John. H. Hallowell (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1975).

[3] Cf. Leszek Kopciuch, „Znaczenie filozofii Oświecenia w kulturze europejskiej. Sprawozdanie z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej Znaczenie filozofii Oświecenia w kulturze europejskiej (Lublin, 4–5 grudnia 2024)," *Kultura i Wartości* 2024, no 38: 153–158, http://dx.doi.org/ 10.17951/kw.2024.38.153-158.

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philosophy can respond to contemporary challenges in the digital era. She focuses particularly on Kant's distinction between opinion, belief, and knowledge, and demonstrates how these can be used to properly explain all contemporary epistemic misunderstandings that are important for social life and public discourse.

Francesco Cataldi (Erasmus University Rotterdam) analyses the political philosophy of Francescantonio Grimaldi, a representative of the Italian Enlightenment. Cataldi highlights the empirical basis of Grimaldi's philosophy. According to Grimaldi, he states, "abstract conceptions of perfectibility [...] can be seen as fostering unrealistic and destabilizing visions of human nature that may lead to demagogic narratives" (p. 61). Cataldi describes Grimaldi as a "thinker who offers a cautionary perspective on political consequences of false assumptions about human nature" (p. 61).

In his article, *The Enlightenment: Navigating Between the Scylla of God's Omnipotence and the Charybdis of Man's Omnipotence*, Jacek Breczko (Medical University of Białystok) attempts to compare the general mental attitude of the Enlightenment with attitudes typical of our time. He is inspired in his reflections by Jerzy Stempołowski. Breczko emphasizes that "the Enlightenment was a foundation governed by moderation and prudence as well as faith in 'gradual' progress (as a reaction to the fanaticism of religious wars), and therefore that—in its mainstream—the Enlightenment was an intermediate era between the medieval belief in the omnipotence of God (focused on preserving the *scala naturae*) and the not uncommon belief in the omnipotence of man in modernity" (p. 119). According to Breczko, "In modernity, the belief in human omnipotence is often transformed into the belief in the omnipotence of one man personifying a class, nation, or humanity: a leader, a spiritual guide, a quasi-Messiah" (p. 119).

In *The Transhumanist Gnosis and Its Roots in the Enlightenment* Jakub Płoszczyniec (University of National Education Commission in Krakow) discusses the connections between key ideas of the Enlightenment and contemporary transhumanism. He interprets transhumanism as a form of gnosis, defined as "the belief in the existence of exclusive knowledge which is a medium of self-salvation" (p. 140). Płoszczyniec argues that transhumanism builds upon Enlightenment ideas such as humanism, anthropocentrism, progressivism, naturalism and rationalism. However, it is more radical than the Enlightenment itself.

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These texts are just a few examples of the issues analyzed during the conference, but they provide a good overview of the topics covered by the term "The values of the Enlightenment."

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