

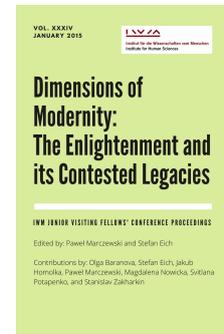
Dimensions of Modernity

The Enlightenment and its Contested Legacies

Paweł Marczewski, Stefan Eich

IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. XXXIV ©
2015 by the author

Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for noncommercial use, provided that the text and this note remain intact. This article may not be reprinted or redistributed for commercial use without prior written permission from the author. If you have any questions about permissions, please contact the IWM.



The 34th Junior Fellows' Conference, held in December of 2014, engaged with the Enlightenment and the contested legacies of modernity. Papers took two different routes into this topic. One group of papers returned to the threshold of modernity in the eighteenth century and sought to rethink the history of eighteenth century debates. A second group of papers turned to the contested contemporary legacies of the Enlightenment in the form of key modern concepts and questions such as history, memory, secularization, and critique.

Olga Baranova investigates the role of history and political ideology in modern memory politics by turning to the historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. In asking how and why Soviet historiography tended to either downplay or universalize the Holocaust Baranova refuses to reduce the question merely to Soviet anti-semitism and instead points to a complicated politics of memory that often repressed the Jewish origin of both Nazi victims and Soviet resistance fighters. The Holocaust was not simply erased from Soviet history books but adapted and rewritten within the confines of a conforming ideological narrative.

Stefan Eich turns to the British suspension of gold from 1797 until 1821 and argues that the surprising introduction of fiat paper money during the French Revolutionary Wars left a lasting mark on the imagination of a whole generation of post-Kantian thinkers in the German lands. Whether radical Kantians, Young Romantics, or Anglophile Hanoverians, in the 1790s German philosophers began to be interested in the politics of money. As Eich traces, what allowed Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Adam Müller and others to grasp the significance of the British suspension of gold was their creative updating of the longstanding metaphorical link between coins and words for an age of paper money.

Jakub Homolka links contemporary debates about the nature of secularization and the status of religion in modernity to the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. Drawing on Patočka's analysis of religion the paper asks how the relation between "rational" and "super-rational" is constituted in the modern Western society once traditional forms of this relation in the form of Christianity were exhausted. Crucial to Patočka's response, so the Homolka, was a distinction between disenchantment and secularisation that has been neglected by the Weberian sociological literature.

Returning to the eighteenth century, **Paweł Marczewski** traces the double-sided nature of Enlightenment quests for equality by placing proponents of radical Enlightenment in Western Europe in conversation with Polish noble republicanism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Challenging the persistent image – forged in the epoch of the Enlightenment by Western philosophers and travel writers – of a laggard Eastern Europe where servitude remained unquestioned, Marczewski turns to neglected eighteenth-century Polish writers such as Michał Wielhorski, Adam Wawrzyniec Rzewuski and Wojciech Turcki to present a vision of an alternative modernity that adopted enlightenment values and submitted them to internal critique. As these Polish republicans argued in calling for the extension of civic and political rights beyond the nobility, the realization of the enlightenment ideal of equality required not only a decentralised state but a decisive condemnation of Western colonial practices of the period.

Magdalena Nowicka traces in her article the Enlightenment heritage of critique through an analysis of contemporary discourses of self-criticism. If the Enlightenment's leading philosophers had heralded rational efforts of freeing oneself from a past marked as prejudiced and ignorant, in the twentieth century the tradition of critique was given a decidedly political and ideological twist in the form of Bolshevik calls for self-criticism. The practice of public self-criticism was used as a useful tool of social control and confirming allegiance to the ruling ideology. After discussing the historical roots of self-criticism, Nowicka turns to its contemporary East European incarnation and analyses how and why criticizing oneself has become once more a means of expressing one's disillusionment with the liberal-conservative market reforms implemented since the 1990s.

The article by **Svitlana Potapenko** once more returns to debates and social upheavals of the eighteenth century by analyzing the response of Cossack elites to the challenge of Russian Enlightened Absolutism under Catherine II. Potapenko shows how, despite gradual centralization of the Russian Empire and incorporation of the local elites into the imperial nobility, the Cossack past became mythologized and today serves as an ideological cornerstone for contemporary Ukrainian nation building.

In the final article of the volume **Stanislav Zakharkin** looks into the concept of virtuality and argues that the term, usually associated with contemporary technologies of digital virtual worlds, has in fact roots in medieval ontology. By returning to the roots of the concept of virtuality, Zakharkin attempts to propose a philosophical framework for analyzing virtual reality that would move beyond simply labelling it as hollow and artificial.

Table of Contents

Politics of Memory of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

Olga Baranova

Paper Money and German Romanticism

Stefan Eich

Patočka and the “Disenchantment of the World”: Linking Patočka to the Contemporary
Discussions of Religion and Secularism

Jakub Homolka

Janus-Faced Enlightenment and the Quest for General Equality in the Polish-Lithuanian
Commonwealth

Paweł Marczewski

Self-criticism in Public Discourse: A Device of Modernization? The Case of Eastern
Europe

Magdalena Nowicka

Cossack Officials in Sloboda Ukraine: From Local Elite to Imperial Nobility?

Svitlana Potapenko

Virtuality as a Basic Concept of Postrealism

Stanislav Zakharkin

Preferred citation: Marczewski, Paweł; Eich, Stefan. 2015.

Introduction. In: Dimensions of Modernity. The Enlightenment and its Contested Legacies, ed. P. Marczewski, S. Eich, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 34.