***What Is Enlightenment?***
Immanuel Kant
1784

*Enlightenment is a person's emergence from his self-sustained dependency.*  "Dependency" is the inability to make use of one's intellect without the supervision of another.  One's dependency is "self-sustained" when its cause lies not in defect of intellect but in lack of the decisiveness and courage to make use of one's mind without the direction of another.  *Sapere aude!*  "Have the courage to make use of your own mind!" is thus the slogan of the Enlightenment.

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a part of humanity prefers to remain in a lifelong condition of dependency long after Nature (granting them majority in years) has freed them from management by others - and why it is so easy for these others to put themselves forward as their guardians.  It is so comfortable to be dependent.  If I have a book that understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who prescribes a diet for me, and so on, I don't need to bother myself.  There's no need for me to think when I can just pay:  others will take over the whole irksome business for me.  That by far the greater part of mankind (and among them virtually the whole of the fair sex) regard the step to independence, quite apart from its difficulty, as *dangerous* - this is something quite deliberately arranged for by those guardians who have so kindly assumed the burden of supervising them.  After first having reduced their domestic animals to muteness, and carefully protected these peaceful creatures from risking the least step beyond the cage in which they have penned them up, they then proceed to set forth for them the danger that threatens if they were to try even to walk on their own.  Now this danger is of course hardly so great, since in the course of a few falls they would surely end up learning to walk.  But a single such example serves to intimidate them from risking any further attempts.

Hence it is difficult for an isolated individual to work himself out of a dependency that has become virtually second-nature to him.  He has become fond of it, and is for the moment really incapable of using his own mind, because no one has ever allowed him the opportunity to make the attempt.  By-laws and set phrases - these mechanical formulae for the "reasonable" use (or rather misuse) of his natural gifts - are the shackles that make for a persisting dependency.  Whoever were to shake them off would indeed be able to manage only an unsteady leap over even the narrowest ditch, because he is unaccustomed to such free movement.  Hence there are only a few who have succeeded in working themselves out of dependency by their own mental efforts alone and who can afterwards walk with a steady gait.

But that a public at large might manage to enlighten itself is, in contrast, something quite possible.  Indeed, if one merely permits it freedom, this is almost unavoidable.  For there will always be a few autonomous thinkers even among the guardians who have been appointed for the masses, who, after they have thrown off the yoke of dependency themselves, will end up spreading beyond themselves the spirit of rational assessment of one's own worth and the calling every human being has for thinking.  But it will also happen that the public, which had earlier been brought under this yoke, forces these themselves to remain under it as well, when instigated by those of its guardians who themselves are incapable of any enlightenment.  So dangerous is it to sow prejudices, because sooner or later these will revenge themselves on those, or on those whose predecessors, were their creators.  Hence it is only slowly that a public can achieve enlightenment.  A revolution may perhaps bring about an abolition of personal despotism and of profiteering or power-hungry oppression, but never any true reform in the public's manner of thinking.  On the contrary:  new prejudices will serve as well as the old ones for a leash on the unthinking masses.

For this enlightenment, however, nothing more is required than freedom, and to be sure the least dangerous sort of all that can be called freedom, namely, the freedom to make *public use* of one's reason on all issues.  But now I hear shouting on all sides!  The officer says, "Don't argue, just drill!"  The tax bureau says, "Don't argue, just pay up!"  The clergyman says, "Don't argue, just believe!"  (Only one sovereign in the world says, "*Argue*, as much as you want, and about whatever you want, but *obey*.")  Restriction of freedom is everywhere.  But what *sort* of restriction is an obstacle to enlightenment - and which is not, but on the contrary, necessary for it?  I answer:  The *public* use of one's Reason must always be free, and it along can bring enlightenment into being among men.  The *private* employment of Reason, however, may often be quite narrowly restricted without posing any special obstacle to the progress of enlightenment.  I understand though by the *public* use of one's own Reason as that which someone makes in his capacity as a *scholar* in addressing the world of *readers*.  I call *private* the use of his Reason he is permitted to make in some specific *civil* post or office to which he has been appointed.  Now for many activities that operate on behalf of the common interest of a corporate group, a certain mechanism is necessary, through which the several members of the organization must conduct themselves in a purely passive manner, in order through an artificial unanimity to be directed by the government to public ends, or at least so that the disruption of these ends be avoided.  Now here it is of course not allowed to argue; rather one must obey.  But insofar as any part of this machine simultaneously regards himself as a member of the entire commonwealth, even as a citizen of the world as a whole, and therefore in the capacity of a *scholar* addresses himself to a public according to his own understanding by means of writing, he can indeed argue without any harm to the affairs in which he happens to be assigned a role as a passive member.  It would be quite pernicious if a military officer, ordered to do something by his superiors, were while on duty to dispute aloud the utility or effectiveness of that order; he has to obey.  He cannot rightly be prevented, however, from making observations as a scholar upon mistakes made in the course of a campaign and from submitting these to the judgment of his public.  The citizen may not refuse to pay the taxes imposed upon him.  Even a cheeky complaint against such impositions, even should he comply with them, can be punished as a scandal that [if not sanctioned] would give rise to general illegality.  Nevertheless, the very same person does not act contrary to his duty as citizen when *as a scholar* he publicly expresses his thoughts about the unwisdom or even the injustice of such decrees.  In the same way, a clergyman is bound to address his lessons to his catechism pupils and sermons his congregation according to the symbol of the church he serves; for it is upon this condition that he is appointed.  But as a scholar he has full freedom - indeed, even the calling - to share with the public all his carefully verified and constructive thoughts concerning what may be in error in that symbol, along with his proposals for improvements in the doctrinal and administrative institution of the church.  In this there is nothing to charge his conscience with.  For whatever he teaches in accordance with his office as an agent of the church is something he represents under the aspect of something he has no authority to teach after his own thinking, but which he is appointed to teach according to the prescription and in the name of another.  He will say, "Our church teaches this or that; these are the foundations it relies on in doing so."  That is, he draws all practical advantage for his congregation from articles that he himself would not subscribe to with full conviction, but to whose recitation he can nevertheless commit himself because it is not altogether impossible that truth lies hidden within them, or in any case that nothing inconsistent with the religiously essential would be met with.  For were he to believe himself to have discovered the latter within them, he would no longer in conscience be able to carry out his assigned duties.  The use then which a designated teacher makes of his Reason before his congregation is a purely *private* use, because this is always merely a domestic gathering, however large it may be, and in view of this he is not in his capacity as priest free, nor is it permissible for him to be, because he is carrying out the instructions of another.  In contrast, as a scholar, who in writing speaks to the genuine public, that is, to the world, the clergyman in the *public* use of his Reason enjoys an unrestricted freedom to make use of his own Reason as he sees fit, and to speak in his own person.  For that the guardian of the people (in intellectual things) should himself again be dependent is an inconsistency that amounts to the perpetuation of inconsistency.

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[This is only the first half of Kant's essay.  But it will suffice for our present purposes, except that we should have a look at a brief passage after the long paragraph that follows our excerpt:]

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If it is then asked, "Are we living now in an *enlightened* age?" the answer must be, "No, but probably in an age of *enlightenment*."  That human beings, as things now stand on the whole, were already in a condition, or could be simply placed in a position, to make use of their own understanding surely and well in religious matters without the direction of another - for that, a great deal is still lacking.  But that the field is now opened to them, to cultivate freely, and the obstacles to a general enlightenment generally reduced (that is, to people's exit from their self-sustained dependency), for that we have ample indication.  From this point of view this age is the age of enlightenment, that is, the age of Friedrich.

A prince who does not find it unworthy of his dignity to say that he holds it a duty not to prescribe anything to people in religious matters, but to allow them complete freedom in these, and who himself thereby declines the arrogant title of *tolerance*, is himself enlightened, and deserves from a thankful world and posterity to be regarded as the one who, at least from the side of government, first delivered the human race from dependency, and left each free to make use of their own intellect in all matters of conscience.