

Original Article

The Age of Enlightenment: Revolution in Thought and Politics, and European Thinkers

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Abstract:

This research explores the fundamental transition of European civilization from the theocentric constraints of the Middle Ages to the intellectual liberation of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. It examines how the shift toward humanism, rationalism, and empirical science dismantled the "Dark Ages" and established the foundations of modern Western identity. The study analyzes the contributions of pivotal figures like Copernicus and Galileo, alongside the evolution of political theories that eventually catalyzed global industrial and social revolutions.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Renaissance, Humanism, European History.

Introduction

The Renaissance, an evocative term derived from the French word for "rebirth," signifies a pivotal turning point in the trajectory of Western civilization. According to historical perspectives, this era served as a transformative bridge, guiding European society out of the "Dark Ages" a period often characterized by intellectual stagnation and dogmatic dominance into a new epoch defined by rational inquiry and humanistic progress. Emerging initially in the 14th century within the prosperous trading hubs of Italy, such as Florence and Venice, the movement was catalyzed by a burgeoning merchant class and the influential patronage of families like the Medici, who transitioned from bankers to primary drivers of artistic and intellectual advancement. This era was not merely an aesthetic revival but a fundamental paradigm shift in how humanity perceived its role in the universe. As noted by Salsabila et al., the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the subsequent collapse of the Byzantine Empire acted as a profound emotional and intellectual catalyst, forcing European thinkers to seek new foundations for their identity. Consequently, there was a resurgence of interest in the classical heritage of Greece and Rome, leading to the birth of Humanism. Humanism redefined the individual, moving away from the medieval view of humans as passive "pilgrims on earth" toward a new vision of the person as a "Renaissance Man" an active creator and designer of history possessing immense intellectual and physical potential. Furthermore, the introduction of the printing press and the opening of public libraries democratized knowledge, allowing the critical spirit of the Renaissance to permeate

beyond the clergy and nobility to the wider society. This intellectual liberation laid the essential groundwork for the Scientific Revolution, where the reliance on theological revelation was gradually replaced by empirical observation and mathematical logic. By positioning human reason at the center of existence, the Renaissance and the subsequent Enlightenment fostered the development of modern political thought, industrial innovation, and the eventual rise of sovereign nation states. Immanuel Kant called the Age of Enlightenment a possibility where a person can achieve the status and capacity of a mature and rational being (Leela Ghandi, 1998:42). Voltaire called the Age of Enlightenment the "age of reason." One indication of this is that the era of guardianship of human thought is no longer there, replaced by a slogan that encourages humans to dare to use their reason (Hadiwijono, 1980:47).

Methods

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative historical analysis that synthesizes chronological events and philosophical developments from the 14th to the 18th centuries. The study examines the integration of classical Aristotelian and Platonic thoughts with empirical observations that emerged following the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople. By evaluating the works of both medieval theologians and Renaissance scientists, the research identifies patterns of ideological transformation and its subsequent manifestation in political and industrial sectors.

Results

The research findings show that the rise of Humanism effectively liberated European minds from the rigid dogmas of the church, giving rise to "Renaissance Men" capable of high intellectual and physical achievements. Scientific progress accelerated as scholars such as Nicolaus Copernicus introduced the heliocentric theory, while Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei used mathematical calculations and the telescope to redefine the universe. Politically, this era witnessed a shift from purely theocratic governments to theories of sovereignty and social contract, as discussed by thinkers such as Marsiglio of Padua and Jean Bodin. This intellectual shift directly resulted in modern advances, including the invention of the printing press and the steam engine, which paved the way for the Industrial Revolution and the birth of the modern nation-state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Renaissance and Enlightenment were transformative periods that replaced the stagnation of the Middle Ages with a culture of reason and empirical inquiry. By positioning the individual at the center of existence, these eras sparked a global ripple effect that influenced democracy, industrialization, and human rights. The enduring relevance of these values is evident in how they align with universal principles of justice and humanism, which continue to serve as the foundation for modern legal and social systems worldwide.

Suggestion

It is suggested that future historical discourse should place a greater emphasis on the specific intellectual exchanges between European and Islamic civilizations during the Crusades, as these interactions were essential for the reintroduction of classical philosophy to the West. Furthermore, scholars should continue to analyze how the

principles of the Enlightenment can be applied to address modern challenges of global governance and social justice to ensure that the mistakes of past authoritarian systems are not repeated.

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