



THE ROLE OF ENLIGHTENMENT IN MODERN EDUCATION

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Abstract. This article examines the concepts of education and enlightenment, their interrelationship, and their conceptual differences. Although these concepts are often used interchangeably in everyday discourse, a philosophical analysis shows that they cannot be regarded as completely identical. In this study, enlightenment is understood as a deeper cultural dimension of education, encompassing the cultural maturity of an individual or society, moral and intellectual development, the advancement of rational thought, and liberation from ignorance and superstition. In this sense, enlightenment is opposed to pseudo-erudition and superficial intellectualism.

The article considers the possibilities and challenges of enlightenment in the contemporary world. Every historical period develops its own understanding of enlightenment and its own conceptions of science and ignorance, rationality and dogmatism, good and evil. Although the general principles associated with the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continue to have relevance today, their specifically anti-scholastic orientation can no longer be regarded as the principal challenge of contemporary enlightenment. In the twenty-first century, critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, scientific literacy, humanism, respect for cultural diversity, and the ability to distinguish reliable knowledge from misinformation have become particularly important.

The beginning of the twenty-first century remains a period in which the ideals of enlightenment have not yet fully overcome violence, fanaticism, dogmatism, and irrationalism. In this context, the ideas expressed by President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev concerning the importance of intellectually and morally mature professionals are particularly relevant. The article argues that contemporary education should not be limited to the transmission of knowledge and professional competencies. It should also contribute to the development of independent thinking, moral responsibility, cultural awareness, intellectual autonomy, and the ability to critically assess information and social phenomena.

The study concludes that enlightenment should be regarded not simply as the acquisition of knowledge, but as a process of intellectual, moral, and cultural development. Therefore, enlightenment constitutes an essential philosophical and cultural dimension of modern education and provides an important foundation for the development of a scientifically literate, critically thinking, socially responsible, and culturally mature individual.

Keywords: enlightenment, education, philosophy, science, rationality, critical thinking, scientific literacy, popularization of science, philosophy of education, new enlightenment.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between education and enlightenment requires a certain degree of terminological clarification. In many scholarly, pedagogical, and literary texts, as well as in



everyday speech, the concepts of “education” and “enlightenment” are frequently used as synonyms. This tendency can also be observed in the names of educational institutions, governmental bodies, publishing houses, and cultural organizations.

At first sight, therefore, the distinction between the two concepts may appear to be merely terminological. However, a deeper analysis demonstrates that the relationship between education and enlightenment is considerably more complex. This raises an important question: Can every educated person, including a person who has completed higher education, necessarily be regarded as an enlightened person in the broader cultural and philosophical sense?

The intuitive meanings of these concepts suggest that “education” and “enlightenment” are not always synonymous. Education is generally understood as a structured and systematic process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, competencies, and qualifications. Enlightenment, by contrast, denotes a broader intellectual and cultural condition. It implies not only possessing knowledge but also being capable of understanding, critically evaluating, and meaningfully applying that knowledge.

Thus, education can be considered one of the principal foundations of enlightenment, whereas enlightenment represents one of the broader cultural outcomes of education. An individual may possess extensive professional knowledge without necessarily demonstrating intellectual independence, critical thinking, cultural awareness, or moral responsibility. Consequently, the quantity of knowledge alone cannot serve as a sufficient criterion of enlightenment.

THE CONCEPT OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EDUCATION

Enlightenment denotes a higher level of intellectual, moral, and cultural development. The concept is traditionally associated with the metaphor of “light,” which is contrasted with “darkness.” Expressions such as “light in darkness” and “enlightenment against ignorance” reflect the understanding of enlightenment as a process of overcoming intellectual, cultural, and moral ignorance.

The distinction between education and enlightenment can be observed particularly clearly in the intellectual tradition of the European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period, education increasingly came to be understood not merely as the transmission of knowledge but also as a means of developing human reason, intellectual autonomy, moral responsibility, and freedom of thought.

This raises an important question: To what extent are the ideas of the European Enlightenment relevant to understanding enlightenment as an essential component of contemporary education?

Enlightenment may be understood, in a broad philosophical sense, as a cultural and intellectual orientation that seeks to replace unquestioned reliance on religious, political, or traditional authority with claims that can be examined through reason and subjected to critical scrutiny. Historically, enlightenment has appeared in different forms and at different times as a process of intellectual and cultural transformation. In Europe, one of its most influential historical manifestations emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [1, p. 369].

The European Enlightenment was characterized by a number of important intellectual principles, including humanism, rationalism, skepticism, freedom of thought, religious tolerance, human rights, criticism of established authority, opposition to superstition, the

struggle against ignorance, and the improvement of social life through reason and critical inquiry.

These principles should not be viewed exclusively as characteristics of eighteenth-century European philosophy. Many of them remain relevant to the contemporary understanding of an enlightened individual. Critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, scientific reasoning, respect for human dignity, tolerance, and the ability to distinguish reliable knowledge from unsupported claims continue to be important dimensions of enlightenment in the twenty-first century.

ENLIGHTENMENT AS A PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL PHENOMENON

The concept of enlightenment, in its broadest sense, cannot be reduced to the ideas of the philosophical movements traditionally referred to as the “Enlightenment.” Enlightenment ideas have emerged in different historical and cultural forms and have been incorporated into various pedagogical, ethical, social, and cultural conceptions.

The question “What is enlightenment?” has repeatedly become an object of philosophical reflection. Michel Foucault, in his discussion of Kant and the Enlightenment, asks what should be understood by the historical phenomenon called “Enlightenment” and whether this phenomenon has not partly determined the ways in which contemporary people think and act [2, pp. 335–359].

Foucault’s approach is particularly significant because it does not treat enlightenment merely as a historical period. Rather, he examines it as a continuing intellectual attitude toward the present and toward the conditions under which people think, act, and understand themselves. From this perspective, modern philosophy continues to engage with the question of enlightenment and with the intellectual legacy of the eighteenth century. The problem of enlightenment is therefore not merely historical; it remains relevant to contemporary discussions concerning rationality, autonomy, freedom, and the relationship between knowledge and social life.

B. V. Markov emphasizes the humanistic dimension of contemporary enlightenment and associates it primarily with humanistic education [3]. In the works of Erich Fromm, enlightenment is connected with the transmission of the guiding ideas and norms of civilization and with the development of a healthy and responsible human personality [4].

A broader understanding of the social function of education can also be found in international philosophical literature. In the article “Education,” M. Krubele raises the question of whether education should be regarded merely as one of many social services or whether it performs a broader cultural function. Education, in this understanding, preserves knowledge of humanity’s highest achievements and cultivates respect for them while also helping maintain intellectual and cultural continuity between generations and cultures [5, pp. 167–169].

In our view, precisely this broader cultural and humanistic function of education can be expressed through the concept of enlightenment.

THE ROLE OF ENLIGHTENMENT IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

Enlightenment is one of the dimensions that is often insufficiently represented in contemporary education and upbringing. This issue concerns both school and higher education and, in different forms, can be observed in educational systems across various countries.

The central question is therefore how the process of enlightenment can be effectively realized within contemporary education.



The history of world education demonstrates that this problem cannot be solved through a single universal method or educational technology. In every historical period, existing educational systems have been criticized for failing to develop intellectual independence, moral responsibility, cultural awareness, and the capacity for independent judgment.

This suggests that enlightenment is one of the enduring questions of human culture rather than a problem that can be resolved through a single institutional or technological reform. The complexity of the issue becomes even more evident under conditions of mass education.

One of the first questions concerns the people who are responsible for contributing to the enlightenment of younger generations. Who can genuinely enlighten others, and who possesses the necessary intellectual and moral qualities to perform this task?

It is reasonable to argue that those who seek to enlighten others must themselves possess a sufficiently high level of intellectual and cultural maturity. In this sense, the role of teachers, university professors, scholars, science communicators, writers, journalists, and other intellectuals is particularly important.

Their task is not merely to transmit information. They should also help individuals understand the significance of knowledge, evaluate competing claims, develop intellectual independence, and apply knowledge responsibly.

Science communication is especially important in the contemporary information environment. Scientific knowledge that remains inaccessible to the general public cannot fully perform its cultural and educational function. Therefore, scholars and educators should be capable of communicating scientific ideas in clear, accessible, convincing, and intellectually responsible ways.

The content and selection of knowledge that contributes to enlightenment are also of considerable importance. It is difficult to establish a single, universally applicable body of compulsory knowledge that would be sufficient for all individuals, cultures, and historical periods. Nevertheless, attempts to define such a body of knowledge have repeatedly been made through recommended reading lists, general educational curricula, and concepts such as cultural literacy.

One notable example is B. D. Hirsch's concept of "cultural literacy," developed in the context of American education. Hirsch attempted to identify a body of basic knowledge considered necessary for effective participation in contemporary American cultural life. The concepts of cultural literacy and enlightenment are related, although they should not be regarded as completely identical.

It is particularly difficult to establish a universal and compulsory "minimum" of enlightenment applicable to all cultures and historical periods. The intellectual and cultural requirements of Ancient Greece, for example, inevitably differed from those of the European Enlightenment and differ again from the requirements of the twenty-first century.

HISTORICAL FORMS OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ROLE OF REASON

It is common to speak of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment as though enlightenment were a single and uniform historical phenomenon. However, it would be more accurate to distinguish between different historical forms of enlightenment and the individual intellectuals who contributed to them.

At a fundamental level, enlightenment may be understood as a transformation in which reason and critical reflection acquire a central role in the interpretation of reality. In the history of



major civilizations, there have been periods when previously established traditions of thought and ways of life were critically reconsidered.

During such periods, previously accumulated experience, social conventions, inherited assumptions, and established authorities may be subjected to critical examination. Rational argument acquires greater significance, while unquestioned authority becomes increasingly open to scrutiny.

René Descartes' methodological skepticism represents one important expression of this intellectual orientation. His method of doubt was not an end in itself. Rather, it was intended to examine inherited beliefs and suspend assent to propositions that could reasonably be doubted in the search for secure foundations of knowledge. Thus, Cartesian doubt should be understood primarily as a methodological procedure for establishing certainty, rather than simply as an invitation to reject everything indiscriminately [7].

Immanuel Kant provided one of the most influential philosophical formulations of enlightenment. In his 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?", Kant described enlightenment in terms of humanity's emergence from self-imposed intellectual immaturity. He associated this process with the courage to use one's own understanding independently and formulated the well-known motto *Sapere aude* — "Have the courage to use your own understanding."

From this perspective, enlightenment requires intellectual autonomy. Individuals should not simply accept propositions because they originate from an established authority. Instead, they should develop the ability to examine arguments, evaluate evidence, distinguish between justified and unjustified claims, and reach reasoned conclusions.

However, this does not mean that reason should replace every other dimension of human existence. Human experience includes emotions, moral values, traditions, artistic creativity, religious convictions, and other dimensions that cannot always be reduced to purely instrumental or formal rationality.

Consequently, contemporary enlightenment should not be understood as the absolute domination of reason over all other forms of human experience. Rather, it should be understood as the responsible use of reason together with an awareness of the complexity and plurality of human life.

RESULTS

The analysis demonstrates that enlightenment should be understood not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as a multidimensional process involving intellectual, moral, and cultural development.

First, education and enlightenment are closely interconnected but are not identical. Education provides knowledge, skills, and competencies, whereas enlightenment involves the ability to understand, critically evaluate, and culturally and morally integrate knowledge into human life. Second, the historical experience of the Enlightenment demonstrates the importance of intellectual autonomy and critical inquiry. The methodological skepticism of Descartes and Kant's conception of autonomous reason represent different but historically significant forms of the broader aspiration toward independent thinking.

Third, contemporary enlightenment cannot be reduced to the historical model of the European Enlightenment. Modern conditions require additional dimensions, including scientific literacy, media and information literacy, critical evaluation of digital information, intercultural understanding, tolerance, and resistance to fanaticism and irrationalism.



Fourth, the role of educators and intellectuals is particularly important. A person cannot effectively contribute to the enlightenment of others without a corresponding level of intellectual and cultural development. Teachers, researchers, science communicators, writers, and journalists therefore have an important social responsibility.

Fifth, enlightenment cannot be reduced to a fixed and universal list of books, subjects, or facts. The content of enlightenment is historically and culturally conditioned. Nevertheless, certain principles — intellectual autonomy, critical inquiry, respect for human dignity, scientific literacy, openness to dialogue, and moral responsibility — can be regarded as broadly significant across cultures.

The historical experience of Indian intellectual development also demonstrates the relationship between enlightenment, social reform, and spiritual development. D. Po‘latova, M. Ahmedova, M. Qodirov, J. Sulaymonov, and Sh. Shozamonov note, in their discussion of modern and contemporary Eastern philosophy, that the processes of social reform and enlightenment in India developed in a distinctive historical context. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, in particular, connected social and spiritual impoverishment with oppressive social structures [6, pp. 94, 165].

This example demonstrates that enlightenment is not solely an intellectual process. It is also connected with social transformation, moral development, human dignity, and the overcoming of forms of oppression and ignorance.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this article allows us to conclude that the fundamental idea underlying different historical forms of enlightenment is the development of human intellectual autonomy and the responsible use of reason.

At the same time, the concept of reason has been understood differently in different historical periods. European Enlightenment thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries generally associated reason with freedom from superstition and prejudice, the pursuit of reliable knowledge, critical examination of inherited beliefs, and the development of scientific inquiry.

However, earlier intellectual traditions, particularly those associated with the Sophists in Ancient Greece, demonstrate that enlightenment cannot be reduced to the modern scientific understanding of rationality.

The Sophists challenged established cultural assumptions, public opinion, and inherited conventions. Their conception of reason was closely connected with civic life, argumentation, public discourse, and the ability of citizens to defend their positions through rational persuasion.

Ancient Greek intellectual culture therefore provides an important example of a form of enlightenment in which rationality was closely related to political and ethical life. The ability to participate effectively in public discourse was regarded as an important component of civic competence.

The development of rhetoric in fifth-century BCE Greece was closely associated with this intellectual and civic environment. The Sophists played a significant role in teaching rhetoric and argumentation, thereby contributing to the development of practices through which individuals could articulate, defend, and critically examine ideas.

The ability to speak persuasively is closely related to the ability to reason. Argumentation requires the organization of thought, clarity of expression, and the ability to respond critically



to opposing positions. In this sense, speaking, reasoning, thinking, and understanding are interconnected intellectual abilities.

The historical transformation of the role of traditional authorities during the Classical period further increased the importance of these abilities. Ancient Greek intellectual culture can therefore be regarded as one of the important historical contexts in which critical reflection and rational argument acquired a prominent role in public life.

Nevertheless, the concept of enlightenment should not be limited to a particular historical period. Enlightenment is better understood as an ongoing cultural and intellectual process aimed at overcoming ignorance, developing independent judgment, strengthening moral responsibility, and expanding the ability of individuals and societies to understand and critically evaluate the world around them.

This understanding is particularly important for contemporary education. The purpose of education should extend beyond the accumulation of information and the acquisition of professional qualifications. It should contribute to the development of intellectually autonomous, morally responsible, scientifically literate, culturally mature, and socially active individuals.

Therefore, enlightenment should be regarded as one of the essential philosophical and cultural foundations of modern education. In the twenty-first century, the idea of a “new enlightenment” should integrate scientific knowledge, critical thinking, humanism, national and universal values, intercultural dialogue, intellectual autonomy, and resistance to misinformation, fanaticism, dogmatism, and irrationalism.

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