Reflections on Enlightenment from Multiple Perspectives

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The Enlightenment was a great intellectual movement of the 18th century in Europe; however, it belongs not only to Western and the past, but also to the world and today. What is Enlightenment? The “Arch-enlightener”\(^1\) is a classic definition given by Immanuel Kant.

Enlightenment is humankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. “Sapere aude!” (Have the courage to use your own understanding!) is thus the motto of Enlightenment.\(^2\)

In Kant, the Enlightenment is one’s intellectual maturity in using one’s own reason and overcoming one’s self-incurred immaturity. The positive dialectic of self-understanding and moral autonomy is captured by Jürgen Habermas. In *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas gives a concise and clear explanation:

In the tradition of the Enlightenment, enlightened thinking has been understood as an opposition and counterforce to myth. As *opposition*, because it opposes the unforced force of the better argument to the authoritarian normativity of a tradition interlinked with the chain of generations; as *counterforce*, because insights are gained individually and transposed into motives, it is supposed to break the spell of collective powers.”\(^3\)

In order to break the spell of social coercion, we must break the intellectual coercion of myth. In this sense, the Enlightenment has two interrelated elements: reason and freedom.

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The Enlightenment has two key words: reason and freedom. Ernst Cassirer in *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) considers the 18th century as an age of intellectual progress. He writes, “Perhaps no other century is so completely permeated by the idea of intellectual progress as that of the Enlightenment….‘Reason’ becomes the unifying and central point of this century, expressing all that it longs and strives for, and all that it achieves.”\(^4\) For Peter Gay, the core of the Enlightenment program is freedom,

> The men of the Enlightenment united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism and freedom, above all, freedom in its many forms -- freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one’s talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his way in the world.\(^5\)

It seems to us that the Enlightenment was a decent intellectual and political program because it captured the values and norms that everyone wanted in order to have decent life and good society. But in the past two centuries, the Enlightenment has been blamed for many things. It was thought to be responsible for various irrational forms of modern totalitarianism; for the Enlightenment insists on human nature to be infinitely malleable, society can be remade by any form of totalitarian state which eradicates all traces of individuality from its subjects. It has also been accused of European imperialism and the most aggressive aspects of capitalism due to the European centralism. It would end in nihilism because skepticism of the Enlightenment denies all “absolute values” and traditions. It has been blamed for ecological disasters because of its anthropocentrism and productivism. In short, the project of the Enlightenment is not only suspicious in theory, but also harmful in practice. In the discourse of modernity, criticism of the Enlightenment has become a prosperous industry. From Hegel to Adorno, all aspects of the Enlightenment, for example, subjective reason, abstract universalism and atomic individualism, are considered to be causes of encroachment of objective reason and disintegration of the power of ethical community.

There are two typical forms of criticism on the Enlightenment: conservatist and radicalist. Edmund Burke accuses the Enlightenment of


casting away our old prejudices. According him, prejudice is the essence of historical cultivation. Any ideas, “the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish.” If we cast away the coat of prejudice, we will “leave nothing but the naked reason” and will fall into subjective madness as the French Revolution. Georges Sorel thinks that the Enlightenment is misleading in epistemology and dangerous in politics. For him, a fatal mistake of the Enlightenment is its reduction of a complicated society to a simple formula and a believe that once we have resolved all natural problems, we also have the capability to deal with all problems of ordinary life. The mentality of such a belief is based on that human beings are prone to fall into an ideology of elitism and statism. According to Williams Leiss, the impulse of growth and the conquering of nature are rooted in the rationalization of the Enlightenment, which unifies the domination of nature with social progress. In brief, in the mind of critics, rationalism, secularism, utopianism, materialism and scientism contained in the Enlightenment lead to not only the alienation of relations between human beings and nature but also the alienation of human relationships and the self-relation of individuals.

How should we respond to these criticisms? First, we have to confess that these criticisms are not pure groundless statements. In the Enlightenment tradition, there were some naive ideas about human nature, reason, history and science. These onesided ideas misled people to trust science and technology, capitalism, industrialization, individualism and instrumental reason, which, indeed, caused negative and harmful consequences in some circumstances. Reflections on the dialectic of the Enlightenment are reasonable corrections to its errors, but many critics went too far, because they did not just criticize the onesidedness of the Enlightenment, but rather totally abandoned the Enlightenment per se.

In order to understand the Enlightenment we should focus on its positive and progressive role in modern society. Stephen Eric Bronner correctly asserts that the “Enlightenment thinking remains the best foundation for any genuinely progressive politics not simply in the West but in those states that suffered most at its hands.” The Enlightenment is not a wrong road, but a pathway to freedom. Individuality, freedom, reciprocity and

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the cosmopolitan ideal of world order are not arbitrary and occasional ideas that we can throw away easily; rather they form a normative foundation of a politics of striving for a better society. Of course, “the twenty-first century is not the eighteenth, there is clearly no exact symmetry between past and present. The analog it might provide for engaged intellectuals, no less than its ethical model for resisting oppressive structures of power, needs reinterpretation to meet new conditions.”\(^{10}\) In this sense, the Enlightenment is still a program that has rational potential.

The conception of the Enlightenment as a project of self-destruction is a misunderstanding, which dismisses the unity of the Enlightenment and takes only one dimension of it. In the original presentation of the Enlightenment, morality and reason were interconnected with liberty and welfare. Condorcet, the father of the Enlightenment, argued that all social evils result from ignorance; all ignorance comes from the ignorance of natural science. The progress of the natural sciences will be followed by the progress of moral and political sciences. However, since Kant, philosophers almost all gave up the naive idea of the Enlightenment. Michel Foucault makes the difference between the spirit of the Enlightenment and the dogma of the Enlightenment. The former is critique and reflection, which recognizes the authority of social order and an absolute limit of human thought. Just as Kant said: dare to use reason and get rid of self-incurred immaturity. For Foucault, the Enlightenment means to transgress given limits, to explore uncharted territories and to live life in new ways. In this sense, the Enlightenment is the unity of critique and freedom. The latter is a blind faith to reason and progress, for it believes that we can discover objective truth by reason, get rid of contingency and prejudices by truth and realize Utopia by progress.

Today, we have witnessed that the naive Enlightenment is bankrupt due to the ecological crisis, loss of meaning, fascist disaster and the return of fundamentalism. However, we cannot throw the baby out with the bath water. The Enlightenment is not a mystery or a sublime thing; rather it holds both a critical attitude towards knowledge as well as practical efforts to improve our world. The spirit of the Enlightenment has two dimensions: cognitive and practical. The former is a cognitive attitude of knowledge, namely, all beliefs of objective and practical knowledge have to be at best justified by the better argument and insurmountable superstitions have to be eliminated. The latter indicates a normal position in praxis, namely, any social order shall be based on the non-coerced consent of the ruled, realize individuality and intersubjective reciprocity in the moral-practical level and eliminate “surplus injustice.” The dogma of the En-

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., 1.
lightenment must be abandoned, but the spirit of the Enlightenment must be persevered.

II

In the modern history of China, enlightenment was a difficult and important problem. When Europe transformed from the Middle Ages to modern society through Renaissance, Reformation, the French Revolution and the industrial revolution, China still lived in its Middle Ages. The most dramatic point of world history was the “Great Divergence,” namely, the rise of the West and the decline of China. Before the European Enlightenment was imported into China, China had an indigenous Enlightenment between the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. Huang Zongxi (黄宗羲, 1610-1695), Wang Fuzhi (王夫之, 1619-1692) and Gu Yanwu (顾炎武, 1613-1682) are considered the “fathers of the Chinese Enlightenment of thought.” Huang Zongxi developed the people-oriented thought in Confucianism and an indigenous theory of democracy. He argued that “the world is the world of peoples, not a world of imperial family,” and that “the law is people’s law, not a law of emperor.” He boldly declared that “monarchy is harmful for people” and must be checked and balanced. Instead he proposed a constitutional monarchy. Wang Fuzhi was a great rationalist in the late medieval period of China. He opposed any dogmatism of blind faith in canons and obscurantism but proposed reductionism and comparison in scientific research. In ethics, Wang Fuzhi refused asceticism and insisted that morality cannot be divorced from human desires. He was also opposed to the theory of historical circulation and “returning to ancients” and claimed that the world can be changed and improved by human beings. Gu Yanwu was disgusted with absolutist monarchy but preferred democracy ruled by majority. According to Gu Yanwu, “the rise and fall of a nation rests with every one of its citizens.” In terms of epistemology, he resisted impractical discussions but promoted “seeking knowledge for solving problems.” He asked for a policy which would “enrich the state and bring benefits to people.” In sum, on the one hand, their ideas played important roles in overthrowing the feudal system; on other hand, in terms of content and nature, their Enlightenment was a self-criticism of Chinese tradition, rather than the first voice of new times.

Since Western modern thought was introduced and spread into East Asia, some Chinese intellectuals ushered in the second wave of Enlightenment. Such intellectuals of the May 4th period as Chen Duxiu (陈独秀), Lu Xun (鲁迅), Hu Shi (胡适) and Li Dazhao (李大钊) deeply felt
China’s backwardness and launched a New Culture Movement through the journal *La Jeuness*. The “anti-tradition, anti-Confucianism, anti-ancient Chinese” was the flag of this New Culture Movement. The new Enlightenment mainly sought for individual, woman and social liberation. Its symbolic slogan was Mr. D (Democracy) and Mr. S (Science). In order to construct an independent, free and democratic nation, those intellectuals boldly broke restrictions and said farewell to the past. However, this vigorous movement of Enlightenment did not complete. On the one hand, a serious conflict occurred between Marxism and liberalism about social development; the camp began to split. On the other hand, imperialists attempted to divide China and the Japanese launched the war to invade China, Chinese intellectuals had to put aside their dispute but made their first priority to save the nation and to find ways to build a strong country. Li Zehou (李泽厚), a contemporary Chinese philosopher, argues well: the modern history of China is a double strain between national salvation and thought enlightenment. Unfortunately, the former overwhelmed the latter.

After thirty years of socialist construction by following the Soviet model, China began a policy of economic reform and opening to the outside world in the 1980s. Again Chinese intellectuals ushered in another new wave of Enlightenment: the third wave of Enlightenment. After the door opened to the outside world, students and intellectuals eagerly learned advanced knowledge of sciences and cultures from the Western world. Many books of Western philosophy and politics were translated and introduced into China. Errors of the Cultural Revolution were corrected; individuality and freedom of thought were respected. This Enlightenment was called an “emancipation of mind.” In philosophy, existentialism, Friedrich Nietzsche, the Frankfurt School and Western Marxism became popular among the young people. Unfortunately, the “89” student movement was aborted and the third wave of Enlightenment was interrupted. In the 1990s, there was a “Great Discussion of Humanist Spirit,” which aimed at defending humanism and the role of the humanities in commercial society. However, this movement focused on the role of the humanities only in universities. Spiritual independence of intellectuals themselves, issues of political reform and liberation of thought were all deliberately avoided.

After thirty years of reform and opening, China was able to improved the conditions out of poverty and backwardness via strengthening its economic development and international status. However, it is still a central question whether China’s Enlightenment can be finished. There are two opposing positions. Cultural conservatives believe that the success of economic development has proven the advantage of Chinese culture and that our task for today is not enlightenment but the rejuvenation of Chinese
civilization. Developmentalists believe that the growth and modernization have proven the success of China’s model of development, as well as the strength and vitality of its socialist system with Chinese characteristics. But modern society does not only entail changing economic structures and technology but also how to develop modern political order and cultural values. In this background, the absorption and localization of “the Enlightenment” is a crucial topic that the Chinese people cannot evade.

III

This collection consists of three parts: (1) Modernization and Enlightenment in China, (2) Rethinking Marxism in Contemporary China and (3) Religious Reflection in Society. Just as in the Western world there are different views on the Enlightenment, in Chinese academia there are also different opinions about it. Below is a brief introduction of papers in this study.

In “On Enlightenment Thinking and the Construction of Chinese Culture Today,” Yu Wujin starts with the concept of time. He argues that there are two concepts of time: chronological and morphological. The first term refers to ongoing ‘click time’; the second how time is thought of structurally in different civilizations or social forms. If we take the Enlightenment to be the dawn of modern civilization, China is not “contemporary” with the 21st century; rather, it is in the same time as the 16th through the 19th centuries in Europe. Thus, Enlightenment is naturally a theme of Chinese society at present. What is Enlightenment? Yu argues, as a noun, the Enlightenment literally refers to an intellectual movement in Europe, particularly in France during the 18th century. Its general meaning denotes liberation of spirit and thought. Based on Kant’s famous article and the work of other Enlightenment scholars, Yu summarizes four basic principles of the Enlightenment: 1. the authority of reason, 2. “disenchantment” of the world, 3. the pursuit of equality, and 4. freedom of personality. The former two principles are the intellectual liberation in the cognitive sense, while the latter two are the liberation of spirit in the moral and political sense. The Enlightenment prepared the leading principles for Europe and the Western world, as well as for the development of modern knowledge and the bourgeois revolution.

In the second part, Yu proposes a revised conception of Enlightenment and discusses how to restart a new Enlightenment. The original movement of the Enlightenment took place in the 18th century; throughout time, we have witnessed great achievements from the ideas brought up by the Enlightenment, but we are also aware of its onesidedness and limitations. Hence, we should revise and reconstruct the Enlightenment.
One way of revising it is to look at the framework consisting of the premodern, the modern and the postmodern. To correct modernity through the lens of premodernity and postmodernity, we should be more sensitive to the cost and risk of modernization and progress. According to “chronological time,” China is in the 21st century, but in terms of “morphological time,” Chinese culture is “contemporary” with 18th century European society. Thus, the task of the Enlightenment is still to be finished.

The reflection on the Enlightenment in Wu Xiaoming’s paper starts from Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s famous book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Wu asks, after World War II, why the reflection of modernity has always been done by examining the Enlightenment. He argues that the Enlightenment was modernity’s secret, birthplace, root, resource as well as essence. Since Hegel, philosophy always understood itself as a reflection of modernity and an answer to the questions of the Enlightenment. Wu agrees with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s claim that modern totalitarianism is not a casual result of the Enlightenment tradition but rooted in its essence and dynamic. Wu thinks that the Enlightenment is the “master spirit” of “domination,” for human beings establish their subjectivity by means of controlling and manipulating nature and objects. The genesis of Weberian Enlightenment is the “disenchantment” of “subjective reason.” Horkheimer and Adorno’s criticism was supported by Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. According to Nietzsche, modernity is nihilism resulting from “self-dethrone of the highest value.” For Heidegger, modernity is “oblivion of Sein” and the blind domination of subjective metaphysics or humanism. The basic logic of the Enlightenment is from self-emancipation to self-extinction of humanity. In this light, we should transcend the Enlightenment and modernity. Further, Wu discusses the relation between the Enlightenment and China. He acknowledges *Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s contributions for its disclosure of subjectivist metaphysics as the origin of Fascism and totalitarianism. However, the book fails to touch on the ontological foundation of the Enlightenment and its breakout with the core principle of modernity. China is a developing and non-Western nation. Despite its late development, China has the sober consciousness of contradictions and limitations of the Enlightenment; however, with its rich cultural resources China can go beyond it.

Chen Xueming’s paper discusses the Enlightenment in contemporary China. He argues that the economic reform and opening to the world have greatly transformed China: (1) from “class struggle” to “economic development,” (2) from “closed borders” to “opening to the outside world,” and (3) from “planned economy” to “market economy.” He thinks that the reform is a double-edged sword, for it was a process of economic growth
and made many people rich, but it also led to social inequality and ecological crisis. If China wants to develop in a healthy way, it should be critical of the Enlightenment and modernity. How should modernity be treated? Chen suggests the importance of Western Marxism. Western Marxism holds a dialectical attitude towards modernity, it criticizes but not refuses it. Chen argues that modernization should be embedded in a socialist framework. By borrowing some ideas from Habermas’ theory of communicative action and Andre Gorz’s ecological Marxism, Chen criticizes negative aspect of modernization, but also recognizes its positive aspects of social prosperity and emancipation. Western Marxism provides a third way between liberalism and planned socialism and it the opposition to fundamentalism and post-modernism. Chen claims, “Once China finds the third way, maybe she can cultivate a new paradigm of human civilization.”

Wang Fengcai’s paper focuses on a theme from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “myth is already Enlightenment, and Enlightenment reverts to mythology.” He defines the Enlightenment as a set of beliefs: technological rationalism, individual centrism and civilizational progressivism. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reveals the dialectic of the Enlightenment spirit. The Enlightenment is an intertwined process of progress and regression, and civilization and barbarism. Thus, the Enlightenment is doomed to be self-destructive. However, Wang thinks that there are some misreadings in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. First, it misunderstands instrumental reason and its onesided effect on the result of science and technology and reason and civilization. Second, in its critique of commodity fetishism, the Frankfurt School is too preoccupied with issues of culture and ideology, but not paying enough attention to economic analysis. Third, it often leads to pessimism and fatalism in its diagnosis of social reality. Therefore, we should go beyond *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and restudy it.

The last paper in this section is Luo Yaling’s “Karl-Otto Apel and Enlightenment.” Luo is one of Apel’s students. According to her, Apel’s philosophy defends the Enlightenment in terms of philosophical solipsism and moral relativism. Apel and Habermas both want to reconstruct the normative foundation for praxis philosophy as general pragmatism. To some extent, their pragmatism is to update the Kantian concept of transcendental reason. Luo takes Kant’s definition of the Enlightenment as a starting point, for it not only captures the core meaning of the Enlightenment but also provides a clear definition. Apel’s philosophy can be understood as a reconstruction of Kantian moral philosophy through transcendental pragmatism. As we known, Apel and Habermas’ discourse ethics is based on the validity of communicative action. For them the communication is action oriented towards intersubjective understanding. Commu-
ication means to mutually take responsibility contained in agreement. Although Apel does not discuss the issue related to the Enlightenment directly, his theory actually has an internal connection with the Enlightenment: 1. Apel’s discourse ethics provides a new insight about the connection between freedom and the Enlightenment. Kant had already offered an insight into the unity of freedom and Enlightenment in his second categorical imperative: treat a person as an end and not merely as a means. Apel rehearses the unity of freedom and reason with universal pragmatics. 2. According to Apel, the reason in communicative action does not provide a substantial principle or norm but a procedure of justifying any norms. The reconstruction of Kantian ethics means two things. On the one hand, we must give up the illusion of absolutism, because we are always involved in imperfect and limited communication. On the other hand, the Enlightenment has its normative requirement, that is to give up nihilism or relativism which refuses rational justification. (3) Although Kant had considered the Enlightenment a virtue, saying “Have courage to use your own understanding!,” Apel takes it as “primordial” virtue. Based on these arguments, Luo thinks that Apel is enlightened.

Zou Shipeng’s paper discusses the “spatial turn” of social theory that was introduced by Michael Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. According to Zou, “spatial turn” is a paradigm shift in humanities and social sciences. As we know, the main stream of modern philosophy is the philosophy of self-consciousness based on historicity and temporality. Lefebvre introduced “spatial turn” into social theory, which was developed by David Harvey, Manuel Castells and others. Zou’s paper does not involve the discussion of the development of social theory, but focuses on the ontological dimension of “spatial turn.” Zou argues that Karl Marx inaugurated “spatial turn.” In the classical version of historical materialism, the spatial expansion underlying industrial capitalism was grasped as a social relationship of human beings in history. Space and time cannot be considered separate elements but a dialectic of unity. As Marx said: “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [Selbstveränderung] can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”¹¹ According to Marxian anthropology, space is not only the natural condition of human life but also the object of human practice; material space is also social space. After Marx, many thinkers introduced new perspectives. Heidegger’s contribution is to deny the conception of homogeneous time, but to consider time an existential horizon of humanity. Lefebvre is the first Marxist who introduced the concept of

¹¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Selected Works (Beijing: People Press, 1995), 55.
“politics of space” and revealed the political significance of the production of space. Space is not only the location of production and consumption but also the field of class struggle and revolution. Foucault points out the main mistake of the dominant theory: “Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.” Actually, “We are in the epoch of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of distance and approaching, of shoulder by shoulder, of scattering in all directions.”

Space is not an empty place that can be filled with any contents; rather any space itself is filled with sensuous and historical contents. Zou argues that space should be rethought by returning to the notion of “einai” (to be). “To be” does not only refer to beings and becoming but also to the site of the happening of beings. “To be” is always to be in a site, which means that there is an essential connection between being and space. Within an existential understanding of space, we can set up a connection between Marxian praxis philosophy and the social theory of capitalism. “Spatial turn” provides us with a new perspective of understanding ourselves and the world since the Enlightenment.

Zhang Xiuqin’s paper deals with Li Da’s interpretation of the Marxian concept of ideology. Li Da (1890-1966) was a founder of the Communist Party of China and a famous Chinese Marxist philosopher. Although his interpretation of Marxist philosophy was influenced by Soviet textbooks, he tried to understand it creatively. Li Da defined ideology as a “social awareness,” which is determined by both economic relations of society and social consciousness of people. Ideology is the unity of social condition and human subjectivity. Like Althusser, Li Da argued that ideology is an eternal phenomenon because every society has its ideology. In a class society, “it could not represent the social awareness of all members in society but is only class awareness.” In a classless society, ideology appears as “the common awareness of all individuals.” The innovation of Li Da’s interpretation is his emphasis that ideology is not only a system of theoretical but also practical consciousness, which consists of the common habits of popular life. Although Li Da’s theory was fettered by Soviet Marxism, his interpretation of ideology as “social awareness” can give us an illumination of the Marxian discourse of ideology.

Passion for totality is a theoretical strive for modernity. For Hegel, a characteristic of the modern world is the collapse of spiritual and social

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unity; the task of philosophy is then to recover totality. Marx also tried to diagnose this historical dilemma. A new element that Marxism has added in the discourse of totality is not just to blame the collapse of ethic community, but to take capitalism as a historical proposition of human emancipation. György Lukács is a key figure in the Marxist discourse of totality. Zhang’s paper studies Lukács’ theory from the perspective of Ernst Bloch’s utopian philosophy. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács is basically a Hegelian, but he also tries to transcend Hegel by giving dialectics of Marxian interpretation. Lukács’ breakthrough point is his emphasis on the difference between alienation and objectification. But this is not all. An important intent of the book is to redeem utopia. As Ernst Bloch says, “There are parts and ideas in *History and Class Consciousness* which are expressions of a common point of view and which really came from me.”14 This gives us a clue to rethink Lukács and his magnum opus. If we admit that Hegel is not just a speculative philosopher of metaphysics but also a thinker who is extremely sensitive to crisis of modern praxis and ethical life, Lukács’ theory of totality can be conceived as a solution to the problem left by Hegel. Lukács’ theory of totality originated from Hegel’s famous statement: “Truth is a totality.” However, unlike Hegel, totality is not an object we ponder, but a state of freedom that must be realized by revolutionary practice. For Lukács and Bloch, passion for totality is a passion for “the other.” “The world will always be other than what we have thought; the future will always be other than what we have planned.” In this sense, Marxism endowed the Enlightenment but with an alternative role: to figure out and to try reaching totality in the future.

There are four papers in the last section, “Religious Reflection in Society.” Wang Xingfu’s paper is a tentative research on the relation between politics and religion in contemporary radical philosophy. As we know, Marx began his theoretical career by criticizing religion. In “On the Jewish Question,” Marx detects a political theodicy in the liberalist theory that the liberal state stands over society as heaven does over earth. However, the opposite is true; the real foundation of religion is our secular life. The mature program of Marxism consists of historical materialism and political economy. The former gives us a secular interpretation of human history, while the latter explains the destiny of capitalist society. The collapse of socialism has caused some suspicions. According to Warren Breckman, “The collapse of the Marxist project of emancipation

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in the late 20th century brought with it the collapse of confidence in the secularizing project that had accompanied it.’’¹⁵

The radical philosophy attempts to connect politics and religion with Marxism and theology in a framework of theological politics. We can call this “returns to religion.” Why are radical thinkers and post-Marxists so interested in religion? To some extent, the “returns to religion” is a compensatory response to the crisis of socialist politics. When the secular world is dominated by neo-liberalism, the revolutionary intent has to be saved by the surrealist power of religion. The first part of the paper discusses the classical Marxist interpretation of religion. Marx criticizes religion from the perspective of radical humanism: “man makes religion, religion does not make man,” “religion is a sign of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of people.”¹⁶ Engels gives a more positive valuation of religion. He points out that the history of early Christianity has notable resemblance with the modern working-class movement; they all expressed the people’s discontent and anger towards an unjust social reality. In general, the Marxian project is atheistic and secular. In classical Marxism, we can dispel superstition and reveal the objective law of history with science so as to realize emancipation through the development of productivity and rational organization of society.

The history of the 20th century denied this secular project. Walter Benjamin was the first one who radically broke with the ideology of progress and secular Marxist tradition. In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin argues that historical materialism should serve theology. He gives radical thinkers two connecting ideas: historical passimism and messianic redemption. Based on these ideas, Slavoj Žižek and Giorgio Agamben construct an alternative to theological Marxism. The team of “returns to religion” in radical philosophy is splendid, including Alain Badiou, Žižek, Agamben, Antonio Negeri and Terry Eagelton. According to John Roberts’ research, the politicization of Christianity in radical thought has two branches: Jesus tradition and Pauline tradition. Broadly, Badiou appeals to Pauline tradition and Žižek appeals to Jesus tradition. Badiou wants to recover fighting universalism, while Žižek tends to recover the idea of messianic revolution. They all insist that religion is a necessary resource in order to transcend neo-liberalist globalization. But, secular politics and religious practice ultimately are two distinctive activities. Marx-

¹⁶ Karl Marx, Early Writings (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 244.
ism is a secular discourse of history and politics; any insights from religion must be integrated into historical materialism and a political program of humanist emancipation. In this sense, religion and Marxism can keep a positive dialogue, but we cannot obliterate the boundary between the two and displace secular politics with religion.

In modern intellectual history, the theory of art and aesthetics is important in criticizing social reality and prefiguring a better state. Most scholars are interested in the cognitive and moral dimensions of the Enlightenment, but the aesthetic Enlightenment has not been treated properly. Lu Kaishua’s paper deals with this problem. In “The Outline of a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” Marx makes a fascinating statement: the development of art as a form of ideology is uneven with the forces of production. In the classical framework of historical materialism, this statement is a difficult problem. Lu is interested in both methodology and substance. In the substantial issue, the author valuates Marx’s interpretation of Greek art and its relation with Greek mythology. In terms of methodology, Lu intends to answer the problem: why does Greek art still remain eternal charm for us although its time was far distant from us? According to Terry Eagleton, the eternal charm of Greek art is just an illusion. If one has a deeper knowledge of the brutal fact and the real background that Greek tragedy based upon, its charm would disappear. Eagleton’s radical sociological interpretation denies that the art product has any aesthetic feature that is independent of its social condition. Lu argues that we can turn to Hegel’s aesthetics in order to resolve this puzzle. In Hegel’s typology of art, there are three kinds of arts: symbolic, classical and romantic. Greek art belongs to classical art. According to Hegel, “classical” art expresses a perfect fusion of content and form, for “content and form is meant to be adequate to one another”; thus, it constructs “a totality and independence in itself.” Lu’s paper does not resolve the contradiction between historical materialism and Marx’s statement on Greek art in a satisfactory way.

Zhang Qingxiong’s “The Market Dimension and the Transcendent Dimension of Religion” tries to look at religion and its complicated significance in a contemporary situation. The author argues that we live in a secular society where the market mechanism has penetrated all parts of social life, including the religious arena. The most difficult problem is how religion adjusts itself to society while maintaining its transcendent inclination towards eternal reality. The coexistence of religion and the market economy has lasted for several centuries in the Western world, but it is a new phenomenon in China. For only forty years, China has finished the process of marketization. The challenge of religion is more serious in China than in Western society. Interestingly, the law of “supply and
demand” in the market is a useful tool to understand the current situation of religion. From the perspective of demand, the more people’s lives are controlled by the arbitrary force of the market, the more they need the soul consolation that religion offers. From the perspective of supply, the more the market develops, the more religious institutions show its interest in the paid service. The interaction between supply and demand causes religion to be a part of the market. The author does not blame this phenomenon; instead, he tries to give an objective analysis. He reminds us that religion is a product of culture. Like art, it has two dimensions. The elegant dimension of religion tries to purify one’s spirit and enhance one's morality and sentiment. The vulgar dimension of religion keeps one’s attention merely on one’s own material and secular needs. Nowadays, the problem with the religious development in China is that the promotion of elegant religions is far less sufficient.

The Enlightenment and Marxism have not made sufficient analyses of this situation. For Marx, religion is the opium of the masses, and any need for religion can be explained by its social background. But religion has a transcendent dimension which is anchored in human nature rather than in material desires. Similarly, the Enlightenment has its blind spots: “Modern Enlightenment tries to substitute religion with reason by replacing all the religion-related social functions with law, moral education and psychological treatments constituted by reason.” Many facts have proved that this is a credulous belief, because abiding by the law and behaving decently are based on not only on reason but also on intent and desire, which are not created by law or morality. The dilemma of modernity is that it wants to replace religion with reason, but reason cannot fulfil all functions of religion. We should not give up the illusion of eradicating religion but try to find out a rational way to co-exist with it.

The last paper is written by Wang Xinsheng, in which he interprets Thomas Aquinas from the perspective of Karl Rahner. Rahner’s thought is a response to Kant’s critical philosophy. According to Kant’s first Critique, we can only have a strict knowledge of phenomena; in terms of transcendental objections like god and the universe, we have only regulative concepts. A critique of all theology must be based upon a speculative principle of reason. Rahner tries to transcend Kant’s negative attitude towards metaphysics. For Rahner, knowledge is not restricted to the possible empirical phenomena; it can reach a kind of dim but real knowledge of being itself. In order to establish this position, Rahner appeals to Aquinas’ doctrine of “Conversio ad Phantasmata.” Like Kant’s critique philosophy, Aquinas’ doctrine is a theory of the possibilities and limits of human knowledge. Unlike Kant, Aquinas does not converse being itself to a subject. Rahner insists on the legitimacy of metaphysics, that being and
knowing are a primordial unity: “Knowing is the being-presence-to-self of being and this being-presence-to-self is the being of the existent.”

Every concept is empty without some intuition of being. If the convention to subject falls into phantasmata, theology is a method of the “retrieval” of transcendent existence. At first, truth is not a subjective organization of experience, but it resides in the adequate understanding of an object. Pure being and pure knowing are the same thing; it is what we call God.

Through Wang’s introduction, we can come to some critique of the Enlightenment with Christianity. The Enlightenment sets up the authority of subjective reason. According Aquinas and Rahner, the Enlightenment is also a new phantasmata. For the new phantasmata, religion and Scholasticism are an antidote.

This collection is not a consistent work. It simply represents serious thinking on the Enlightenment, religion and philosophy from the perspectives of China. The Enlightenment is an open project that invites all people to join, even its critics. Xunzi (荀子) once said in On Learning: the biggest mistake of humanity is that it is limited by oneside views and blinded to comprehensive ideas. The Enlightenment is an endeavour to overcome all kinds of blindness. Any sincere thinking is welcome.

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