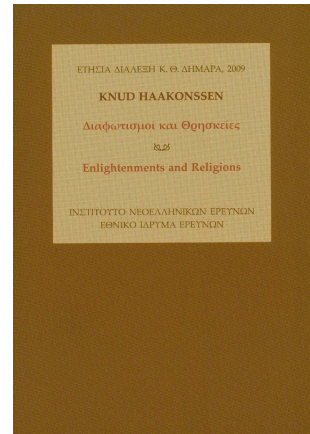




INSTITUTE FOR NEOHELLENIC RESEARCH  
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**Διαφωτισμοί και Θρησκείες**  
**[Enlightenment and Religions]**

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Annual C. Th. Dimaras Lecture -2009, INR/NHRF, Athens 2010, 140 pp.

Half a century ago, friends and foes of the Enlightenment were at least agreed that this phenomenon in European history was characterised by anti-clericalism and some degree of critical distance to religion. Today, many scholars are defending an Enlightenment that is, if not a religious movement, at least intimately intertwined with religion. Much of the work that has been done has consisted in using the relationship between Enlightenment and religion to re-define the concept of either or of both. In considering this debate about the nature of the Enlightenment and its relationship to religion, we may conveniently start from the publication some forty years ago of one particularly important work. Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, published in 1966, was a major synthesis that aimed at surveying the European Enlightenment as a whole, and it did so in order to argue for the general thesis that the modern secular world had been intellectually shaped in its essentials through the leading thinkers of the Enlightenment. This idea that the Enlightenment in its very nature was irreligious and anti-clerical was not new. His work was thus at variance with the fine-grained contextual study of texts that was rapidly establishing itself as a virtual 'school', soon to be known as 'the Cambridge school' of intellectual history.

As part of the growing fashion for cultural history, scholars began to investigate the Enlightenment as a variety of distinctive practices, as opposed to a set of articulated doctrines. For example, there was Robert Darnton's disclosure of an Enlightenment running in social classes and groups that had been entirely obscured by traditional history of the ideas of the 'high' Enlightenment. Or there was Jürgen Habermas' theory of a 'public sphere' in which more or less institutionalised practices took form, an idea that has sparked a wide variety of studies. But by the 1960s and 70s, not least under influence of Thomas Kuhn's work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, science itself began to have its history written in a new way, not as analysis of the progress of scientific ideas, but as the account of communities of individuals united in forms of behaviour, attitudes, methods and techniques. A rather different argument for diversity came with the suggestion that the Enlightenment should be seen in national context, an idea that first was made popular in a collection of articles edited by Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich.

The common feature of all these briefly indicated developments is that they tended to explode the idea of one coherent Enlightenment. They were aimed at creating a diverse Enlightenment or a plurality of Enlightenments. In view of this dramatic pluralism, it is hardly surprising that the relationship between Enlightenment and religion has been thrown wide open. However, partly as a consequence of the pluralistic ideas of intellectual history outlined earlier, the relevant notion of religion was transformed. It became possible to see it as a shift from institutionalised ritualistic religion to a different form of religious practice. If both Enlightenment and religion in the eighteenth century are as many-sided and complex, then the idea of relating them to each other becomes rather dubious. One of the most prominent contributions to recent Enlightenment debate has been the previously mentioned work by Jonathan Israel. His central suggestion is that we can and must identify the Enlightenment in terms of Spinoza and his legacy. Another important case from the Continental Protestant world that is likely to confound notions of a straight march of the mind towards modernity is that of Protestant natural law.

However, it was in fact only with the so-called Catholic revival of the late nineteenth century that natural law became quite the prominent hallmark of the Roman Catholic religion that we think of today. While there are striking theories of individual rights in the early-modern period, it is more than a little difficult to make them into anything like a coherent tradition, and they were definitely not the dominant feature of Protestant natural law in general. To the contrary, the latter was in most cases a secular version of the Christian doctrine of the duties and offices that was thought to make up life on earth. The common natural law doctrine was a holistic social ethics in which rights were secondary and subordinate to considerations of the common good or public safety. Here it is intriguing to compare Geneva and Scotland. In both countries, the encounter between Enlightenment and Calvinist theology has often been considered to be related and connected.. The so-called Moderate party in the Scottish Church has become emblematic of this form of Enlightenment. At the same time, outside of this mainstream of Moderatism there was a wide variety of serious intellectual accommodations between Calvinist theology and Enlightenment ideas, a phenomenon that has been referred to as a hitherto “invisible Enlightenment” of evangelical ministers and lay people who shared progressive educational ideals that we associate with Enlightenment in the conventional sense.

The countries making up not just Great Britain, but the British Isles were in many ways the epitome of the complex relations between church and state in the early-modern period. Conventionally we would say that separation of church and state based upon the idea that the church is a private voluntary association is an Enlightenment ideal, and because such ideas had roots in Calvinism, this form of theology has commonly been associated with the birth of the Enlightenment, most famously in Hugh Trevor-Roper’s essay on ‘The religious origins of the Enlightenment.’ Turning to the opposing side of the confessional divide, convention would have it that the very antithesis of Enlightenment was a Church, such as the Anglican, that saw itself as established on the basis of the apostolic succession and hence in principle as universal, encompassing the state and entitled to its protection as part of divine providence (indeed, there remained a strong element of divine-right ideology within the Anglican Church). A particularist approach to the question of Enlightenment and religion would likewise seem to have direct implications for the long-standing debate whether and in what sense there was a transfer of ‘the’ Enlightenment to the Orthodox world. Behind that set of problems lurk the big questions, whether it makes sense to talk of a coherent European Christianity as an object of ‘the’ Enlightenment’s attention, and whether ‘the’ Enlightenment’s supposed issue in a secularised culture is a European ‘Sonderweg’, rather than being the mother of all modernity.