

Enlightenment Revisited: The Second Enlightenment

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In light of the nature of the rational and empirical philosophies we have explored from the Indian, Greek and Iranian worlds, it is now a natural progression to reflect on the Western Enlightenment. The Western Enlightenment could easily be called ‘liberation philosophy’ in a European context. We will review the trajectory that philosophy took in the West during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and see how that path was influenced by the ancient thinkers Epicurus and Lucretius specifically, in order to explore the sociopolitical effects of a revival of past philosophies. Along the way, it will be easy to see European philosophical parallels with the thinking of the Asian liberation philosophers we have been exploring thus far as well. The European philosophers of the Enlightenment were responding to the culturally and religiously oppressive conditions of their time, and their emergence reminds us of how and why the Çārvākas, the Buddha, Khayyam and Rumi emerged in their own times as well. Maybe it’s also time now for a modern resurgence of these powerful philosophies.

The European Enlightenment: A Fresh Return to the Past

Given the carnage and ongoing conflict, despotism, depression and the manifestation of religious oppression in European societies at the close of the Middle Ages, Enlightenment thinkers each in their own capacity tried to remedy the dire conditions entrapping people. But what is particularly intriguing in those European circumstances between the 15th and 19th centuries is that the search for solutions went deep into the past, to pre-Christian times. The shattering of the absolute domination by the Catholic Church with the advent of the Reformation, the revival of skepticism, and the groundbreaking scientific revolution made it possible to doubt the existence of god - and the existence of god was even assumed implausible. As a result, this god was gradually replaced by an impersonal Nature.¹ The guilt, devout sentimentalism and oppression of religion gradually lost their holds on the minds of the literati of the time.

The influence that Epicurus and his philosophy had on Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers during this time is absolutely undeniable.² The Epicurean idea of free thinking and happiness gradually brought European thinkers past their religious inhibitions as they began to write openly about the rights of citizens to be happy in life; hundreds of essays and books appeared on the topic of ‘happiness’ during this time.

Another of the major tenets explored in the Enlightenment movement was the ideal of free and independent thought. The power structure of the Church, with a clergy that thought for and

¹ Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 79, 79-124.

² See Neven Leddy and Avis Liefshitz (eds.), *Epicurus in the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2009). Those who were definitely influenced by Epicureanism were Malebranche, La Mettrie, Diderot, Helvétius and Hume.

decided for individuals (as religion had been doing for millennia), had compromised human reasoning power for centuries and now it was being challenged. Blind belief and obedience, that pernicious partnership of regressive thinking, was shaken to the core. Eventually, intellectual maturity and philosophical dexterity paved the way for people to have the right to reason their own understanding and be able to express themselves without fear of condemnation of religious or political authorities. Immanuel Kant called this self-liberation *Selbstbestimmung*:³ ‘self-determination,’ ‘self-rule,’ ‘deciding for oneself,’ and using one’s own reasoning power. It also signified being free, self-organized, without inhibition from external circumstances. While Kant made no distinction between self-organization and morality, both were tightly connected with personal will, reason and ethical considerations.⁴

This was truly liberation philosophy. Independent thinking and decision-making without the interference of self-appointed ruling classes was the fruit of the new logic of the Enlightenment. The goal of this new logic was multi-layered: it was designed to understand and test the laws of nature through scientific methods, minimize human suffering, create a tolerant and beneficial society, introduce a new political mechanism of checks and balances, provide free access to knowledge, and finally develop a society that could challenge and debate the authority of religious institutions, superstition, and the belief in god. Thus, to understand the natural world and human nature, reason, science, humanism and progress were and still are the basis of the Enlightenment.⁵

The new thinkers of the time recognized the power of a supreme logic out of which mathematics emerged, and this trajectory led to the discovery of the laws of nature and universe. These thinkers understood this natural logic to be greater than god per se, since god can’t even change its own laws.⁶ The power of observation and experimentation led to the conclusion that there is no counterevidence against the predictable rule of logic. Reason therefore became the law for logicians to follow, both to understand what was not previously understood, and, by the power of reason, to improve the conditions of life on various levels for everyone by overturning the power of dogma through scientific proof.

To implement the philosophy of liberation and to make the ‘renaissance’ of new ideas a reality, the ancient atomist and modern scientific theories needed to be proven empirically correct. The microscope, telescope, thermometer, barometer, and pendulum clock, sometimes known as “philosophical” instruments, gave the natural philosophers (who would become known as

³ Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zu einer Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1786. See also Volker Gerhardt, “Selbstbestimmung: Zur Aktualität eines Begriffs,” *FIPH Journal* 8 (September 2006), 1-7.

⁴ See Jacqueline Karl, *Selbstbestimmung und Individualität bei Platon: Eine Interpretation zu frühen und mittleren Dialogen* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010), 22.

⁵ See the new book by Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 2018).

⁶ William S. Cooper, *The Evolution of Reason: Logic as the Branch of Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 178.

scientists) the ability to measure quantities that had never seen or understood before.⁷ In a sense, those instruments that measured the physical realms were also indirectly testing the human capability of logical thought: if the instruments measured correctly and theories were proven correct, then the human logic behind them was also correct. Perhaps it is not without reason that science was called ‘natural philosophy.’

The first scientific and empirical challenge to the old dogma began with a telescope. Galileo’s telescope brought forward a revolutionary idea. In 1632 he published his manuscript claiming that the sun is in the center of the ‘universe’ and the earth revolves around the sun, in breach of the Church’s 1616 agreement that he should not state such a thing. Galileo’s ‘heretical’ statement undermined the doctrine of the Church as the possessor of the only logical truth.⁸

Some 50 years after Galileo, in 1687, Newton used the calculus that he had invented for calculating infinitesimal units of speed and time and to work out the laws of motion using geometrical, mathematical interpretations. Using such mathematics, Newton could describe and even predict the motion of objects. This enterprise transformed reasoning power by taking humans beyond their natural and visual faculties.⁹ The realization that mathematics could be used to describe the workings of the orderly universe overturned the medieval magical thinking that all is in god’s hands. ‘Progress’ began to mean moving beyond merely understanding the causes to finding patterns and laws, such as the mathematical laws governing the universe. And although there was still the tendency among the religious crowd to attribute all causes and laws to god, human knowledge and existence were destined to be revolutionized by the renaissance of reason and science.¹⁰

In the same way that science was leading the way to logic, philosophy also began to free people from superstition and subjugation. A number of philosophers of the Western Renaissance and Enlightenment drew their didactic philosophies from the Epicurean school, whose teachings had been demonized and stigmatized as hedonistic and immoral during the Church’s medieval domination of Europe. The works of Epicurus had been destroyed or had gone missing, yet somehow, in the fifteenth century the single major work representing the teachings of Epicurus, Lucretius’s *The Nature of Things*, resurfaced and was quickly copied and circulated (see chapter 5). Since its views were antithetical to the Church, Lucretius’s text remained on the list of

⁷ Jean-François Gauvin, “Instruments of Knowledge,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 316-18 (315-337)

⁸ Desmond M. Clarke, “The Epistemology of Religious Belief,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 549-559 (548-570).

⁹ Stephen Gaukroger, “Picturability and Mathematical Ideas of Knowledge,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 338-9, 350, 352, 354 (338-360).

¹⁰ Tad M. Schmaltz, “From Causes to Laws,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32-50 (32-50).

forbidden books. But despite such attempts at suppression, the ideas within could not be contained. Its time had finally come in the intellectual and scientific life of the European Renaissance, and philosophers of that time emphasized several major Epicurean principles (even though Epicurus or Lucretius were not always or directly mentioned in their works). These principles later dominated the Enlightenment atmosphere: the power of reason, relying on one's own nature, appreciating pleasure, avoiding useless knowledge, and liberating the oppressed mind.¹¹

Philosophical propositions such as the atomism of Epicurus-Lucretius not only regained momentum in the philosophical materialism of the seventeenth century onward, but triumphed from being a hypothesis to becoming a sound epistemological model in the domain of the sciences and philosophy.

Generations of Enlightenment philosophers brought about an incredible upheaval on the continent, but a number of prominent ones captured the spirit of ancient atomism, empiricism and rationalism. For example, the mechanical philosophy of Newton is inherently atomistic. It has been adduced that Newton's atomistic views appear in the *Principia Mathematica*, where Newton claimed "the least parts of bodies to be—all extended, and hard and impenetrable, and moveable, and endowed with their proper inertia."¹² "There is no doubt that Newton shared the assumption of the ancient and mechanical atomists that there is just one kind of homogeneous matter of which all atoms are composed. This is clear from the way in which Newton explained the differing densities of observable matter in terms of the amount of space intervening between the component atoms."¹³

Newton had established another logical niche: the predictable, orderly, mathematical natural laws that govern the universe. John Locke, a friend of Newton's, took this idea further, stating that if the universe and nature are governed by laws, then societies should be governed by such order as well, not by the arbitrary and absolute power of the elites.¹⁴ The very same political spirit influenced a series of French revolutionary thinkers and philosophers such as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau. The sciences and philosophy, in reflecting one another, relentlessly emphasized the value of thinking and reason over belief and superstition, especially about matters in the public realms.

Besides logic and materialism, the liberation philosophy essentials of reason, happiness and self-rule were powerful themes among Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers. The number of

¹¹ Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters*, 58-61.

¹² "Atomism," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/atomism-modern/>. Accessed October 30, 2018.

¹³ See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/atomism-modern/>. Accessed October 30, 2018.

¹⁴ See G.A. J. Rogers, "Locke, Newton and Enlightenment," *Vista in Astronomy* 22/4 (1978), 471-76. While some debate whether both thinkers influenced each other, it is clear that they both laid the foundation of the Enlightenment in the 17th century.

philosophers who espoused and wrote about ideals that seem almost copied from the work of ancient liberation philosophers is more numerous than can be included here. But a brief survey of a handful of these thinkers demonstrates the power and infiltration of liberation ideas.

The Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne built upon Lucretian and the Epicurean philosophies by emphasizing that living well is not dependent on our intellectual arrogance, or when we patronize non-literate people. Instead, he claimed that the power of reason is the highest-level tool to be used in order to attain happiness and pleasure of life, not to gain so much dull knowledge. Philosophy was in fact the source of living well and virtuously. Living happily also meant being physically strong in order to withstand heat, cold, pain, difficulties and other pressures in life. It meant maintaining a temperate mood, thinking honorably, traveling, studying philosophy for attaining adequate knowledge of life, and dealing with death using soundness of mind. Montaigne's idea of happiness aimed at ridding oneself of the fear of death, hell and suffering.¹⁵

In the work of Nicolas Malebranche, an influential seventeenth century philosopher, we see the effort to liberate people from the constricting influences of religion and myth. In endorsing the rejection of superstition and medieval metaphysics, Malebranche argued that in an orderly and empirical world even a genuine god cannot save a good person from drowning.¹⁶ All the evidence points to this fact, as opposed to blind belief. The illusion that god is punishing human beings through natural disasters, commonly known as "acts of god," is anthropomorphized in one's own mind.¹⁷

In the same period, Spinoza accelerated the disputation of belief versus reason, holding the opinion that the scriptures and prophets offer no knowledge; they only heighten the imagination.¹⁸ The character of the 'god' of religion was challenged by Spinoza's point that 'god' as a nomenclature may have originally been intended to represent the harmony and mystery of nature. Spinoza meant that god is *natura naturans*: nature is natural; it cannot be supernatural. In this sense, nature is reality, and reality is harmony. "Spinoza pragmatically was an Epicurean materialist. As in Epicurus and Lucretius, Spinoza's God is scarcely distinguishable from Nature, and is altogether indifferent to us, even to our intellectual love for him as urged

¹⁵ José R. Maria Neto, "Scepticism," *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 230, 241 (227-248). (Charron, of course, was accused of being an atheist.)

¹⁶ Steven Nadler, "Conceptions of God," *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 528-9.

¹⁷ The presence of Epicurean ideas in Malebranche's disputation against Christian dogma has been debated. See Elodie Argaud, "Bayle's Defence of Epicurus: The Use and Abuse of Malebranche's *Méditations chrétiennes*," in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, Neven Leddy and Avis Liefshitz (eds.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2009), 13-30.

¹⁸ Richard H. Popkin, *Spinoza* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 59.

upon us by Spinoza.”¹⁹ This was a major breakthrough in challenging the Judeo-Christian god and introducing a new concept of god based on visible nature and the harmony around it.²⁰ The Epicurean-Lucretian lens filtered Spinoza’s reading of the Hebrew Bible.²¹ Spinoza defended freedom of thought, speech and belief and refused to allow the priesthood to have power over communities.²²

The pendulum of thought could not be stopped; rebellious empirical ideas were pouring in, such as from the eighteenth-century figure Denis Diderot. His endorsement of the cultivation of pleasure is directly drawn from Epicurus’ notion of enjoying life.²³ As with other philosophers of his time, Diderot’s atomism and the manifestation of nature based on the dance and configuration of atoms was most probably inspired by Epicurus and Lucretius.²⁴ Through undertaking the monumental work of his *Encyclopedia*, Diderot also became a major proponent of the mass popularization of knowledge that was previously held in the monopoly of the church, the state, and the artisanal classes. His cause also became the power of reason over belief, which gradually created a wide rift between him and the Church. He claimed that there is no god and the creation story is only a fiction (all reflected in his *Pensées*). Meanwhile, Diderot also rejected all public claims of mystical experiences and miracles. Through his skepticism, he declared that god is only found within the compounds of sanctuaries, while the members of society are suffering and in tears.

Diderot’s other cause was *freedom* – of religion, thought, and eventually self. The thinking self symbolizes one’s own religion and one’s own god, as he put it. The self and nature were for Diderot the most authentic sources for the clarity that humans sought, but only if humans could leave their blind views behind. Diderot’s intellectual mandate in defense of freedom, free information-encyclopedia for all, reason, and atheism impacted the philosophical and social realms tremendously. The rising intellectual change of attitude worried the Church. Diderot’s approach, with the naturalism and atheism that stemmed from Epicurean and Lucretian thought, was feared by the establishment. Not surprisingly, his ideas were condemned and his book ordered burned in public. Philosophers were suspect; their books were banned. Yet despite this, two more important philosophers influenced by Epicurean thought swayed the European way of

¹⁹ Harold Bloom “The Heretic Jew,” a book review “*Betraying Spinoza* by Rebecca Goldstein,” *New York Times*, June 18, 2006.

²⁰ Spinoza’s religious enemies suspected that his pantheistic outlook came from plagiarizing and combining the ideas of the Kabbala with the terminologies of Descartes to make it look original. See Popkin, *Spinoza*, 1, 37, 82.

²¹ Warren Montag, “Lucretius Hebraizant: Spinoza’s Reading of Ecclesiastes,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, (Feb. 27, 2012): Wiley Online Library.

²² Ursula Goldenbaum, “Sovereignty and Obedience,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 500, 502, 505, 509, 512-13 (500-521).

²³ Natania Meeker, “Sexing Epicurean Materialism in Diderot,” in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, Neven Leddy and Avis Liefshitz (eds.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2009), 85-104.

²⁴ See Gerhardt Stenger, “L’atomisme dans les *Pensées philosophiques*. Diderot entre Gassendi et Buffon,” *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, (Fait partie d’un numéro thématique: *L’épicurisme des Lumières 2003*), 76 (75-100). See also by the same author, *Diderot, Le combattant de la liberté* (Paris: Perrin 2013).

thinking enormously as seen in the works of Claude Adrien Helvétius and Julien de La Mettrie in the 18th century.

The essays of Claude Adrien Helvétius in “On the Mind” (*De l’Esprit*) were of such a utilitarian, rational and atheistic nature that they caused outrage in the Church and resulted in the burning of his works on the basis of heresy. The very same aims of happiness and pleasure of life that Epicurus-Lucretius emphasized, Helvétius developed by different methods. He believed birth and the mental propensities of people are sheer chance and haphazard, but that people are free to avoid pain and explore new potentials. His poetry on “Happiness” (*Le Bonheur*) symbolizes his hedonistic philosophy and his promotion of a new self-education regardless of birth and environment – all in the pursuit of happiness despite the inequalities and the despotism of religion, state and universities. Thus, his political ideas were also influenced by Epicurean notions.²⁵

Julien de La Mettrie was another Enlightenment atheist-materialist-hedonist philosopher-physician. One cannot fail to notice the Epicurus-Lucretius influence on his ideas about mind as matter, and that humans are just another animal in nature in pursuit of pleasure. It is said that La Mettrie did not necessarily give atheism a good name in his day, bluntly claiming the guts of human and those of animals to be identical, thus published in his treatise, *Man a Machine*.²⁶ Nevertheless, he outlines a treatment for the self through cultivating pleasure without religion,²⁷ a ‘medical Epicureanism’²⁸ (*Discours Sur le Bonheur*), and describes the human biochemical constitution as a machine that drives human life.²⁹

The philosophies of Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius continued to revolutionize the view of the human condition based on those ideals of freedom and pursuit of happiness. Thomas Jefferson admitted that he was an Epicurean, and it is not at all difficult to recognize how the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution arose out of Epicurean elements. Despite the 2100-year gap between the two men, Epicurus and Jefferson both believed that all people deserve “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” For Epicurus, all people, included women and slaves, poor and rich, were equally capable of learning and enjoying the wisdom of life – all attended his Garden academy in pursuit of knowledge. The paradox between Jefferson’s ownership of slaves and his ideal of “pursuit of happiness” for all demonstrates that he was still

²⁵ Pierre Force, “Helvétius as an Epicurean Political Theorist,” in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, Neven Leddy and Avis Liefshitz (eds.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2009), 105-118.

²⁶ Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters*, 111-12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁸ See Charles T. Wolfe, “A Happiness Fit for Organic Bodies: La Mettrie’s Medical Epicureanism” in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, Neven Leddy and Avis Liefshitz (eds.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2009), 69-84.

²⁹ This empirical and hedonistic influence of the Epicurean school of thought *Système d’Epicure* (The System of Epicurus) in La Mettrie’s *Philosophical Works* has been edited and published in 1996. See Julien de la Mettrie, “The System of Epicurus,” in *Machine Man and Other Writings*, edited by Ann Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89-116.

entangled by the discrimination and limitations of his generation, and not fully able to implement his Epicurean imagination and idealism.

Two other personalities who benefited in one way or another from the Epicurean philosophy were Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Both of these figures in their own distinct ways influenced European thought. In his writings in the nineteenth century, Karl Marx relied on Hegelian philosophy but his doctoral dissertation was based on Epicurean fundamentals, entitled: “The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature.” Marx’s materialism, egalitarianism and happiness for all found their roots in the naturalism and rationalism of Democritus and Epicurus. For Marx, Epicurus represented the Greek enlightenment, and was a blissful and satisfied philosopher.³⁰ Marx himself embraced the power of philosophy as a vehicle of awakening as well as social and intellectual transformation.

To consider further the potency of Epicurean pleasure and didactic thinking, we can see that Nietzsche’s life and writing in the nineteenth century were also influenced by the example of Epicurus as well. “For Nietzsche, Epicurus is one of the greatest human beings to have graced the earth, and the inventor of ‘heroic-idyllic philosophizing’.”³¹ The philosophy of Epicurean pleasure, peace, good will, self-cultivation and liberation is certainly reflected in Nietzsche’s *The Joyful Science* or *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*), but particularly in his *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (*Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*).³² Nietzsche, perhaps noting that although Epicurus’s teachings has been rejected politically in the past, they were fundamentally sound, and alive and well, had this to say about Epicurus: “Epicurus has been alive in all ages and lives now, unknown to those who have called and call themselves Epicureans, and enjoying no reputation among philosophers. He has, moreover, himself forgotten his own name: it was the heaviest burden he ever cast off.”³³ Nietzsche, although an atheist himself, was first and foremost searching for philosophical and psychological methods to liberate himself and his audience from the bondage of religion. Nietzsche was searching a philosophical position beyond theism and atheism, where the autonomy of the mind is rooted.³⁴

It was the confluence of streams of thought that made the Enlightenment a critical bifurcation and an influential era. Consequently, a new mindset with new language outside of the traditional theistic cultural life was adopted. Arguments debating logic and the power of god led to rationalist and anti-rationalist discourses.³⁵ Logical “ideas,” were defined, given status, and

³⁰ Keith, Ansell-Pearson, “Heroic-idyllic Philosophizing: Nietzsche and the Epicurean Tradition,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 74 (2014), 237, 242, quotes from Marx’s dissertation. (237-263).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 237. The author quotes F. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), section 295.

³² *Ibid.*, 238-41.

³³ *Ibid.*, 239, quoting Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, section 227.

³⁴ Keiji, Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 64.

³⁵ Nadler, “Conceptions of God,” 525-547.

believed to emanate from self-reflection.³⁶ The power of abstraction and the dialectics of deductive reasoning led to strong philosophical traditions. Not only just the sciences, but the language of metaphysics also had to be adjusted along these new lines of thought. The “abuse of words”, whether religious threats, or the use of disturbing and insulting jargon by the authorities which had affected the way of thinking of the population had to be purged from the public sphere. “Artificial ignorance and learned gibberish” were to be replaced with “charm of eloquence” and “reason and eloquence” to modify the minds, and lead humans out of obscurity.³⁷ And thus, the unfolding of the Enlightenment and its resulting achievements became a river of thought arising out of the confluence of many minor streams, including the ‘stream’ of Epicurean philosophy and its offerings of liberation philosophy.

Given the intellectual power of hundreds of thinkers and scientists, Enlightenment ideals had the potential for global effect, but instead remained limited to parts of Europe and North America. Nowadays, however, due to our knowledge of the world, extensive traveling, translation of Asian texts, and knowledge of liberating schools of philosophy, the world can now learn more about Epicurus, Lucretius, and modern European philosophers who were influenced by them. Having said that, perhaps even Europe itself, despite having passed through its “first” Enlightenment, is ready to embrace and integrate older ideas from within the Asian philosophies in revitalizing a “Second” Enlightenment.³⁸

A critical paradox (and weakness) in the European Enlightenment was that despite such lofty goals of happiness, they still saw humanity in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Despite the fact that the Enlightenment was a secularized phenomenon, its values were primarily endorsed relative to Europe’s overseas settlers due to their shared Christian background, and were rarely applied to those people being colonized.³⁹ The Enlightenment’s ‘search for happiness’ only referred to the Europeans’ own happiness and those like them; it didn’t apply to the happiness of everyone. They were aiming for the pursuit of ‘happiness’ of their own people and countries actually at the expense of others’ happiness. They couldn’t yet see the humanity of the Africans, Asians, South Americans, Native Americans or the original people of any other colonies. It was not a universal humanism. Gender inequality, racism, national-chauvinism, eurocentrism and colonialism remained uninhibited and malicious despite the Enlightenment ideals. This fundamental paradox

³⁶ Pauline Phemister, “Ideas,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142-159 (142-159).

³⁷ Jaap Maat, “Language and Semiotics,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke and Catherine Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 272, 277, 278, 291 (272-294).

³⁸ The designation of “Second Enlightenment” here in this chapter is not to be confused with the German translation of Neil Postman’s book title, *Die zweite Aufklärung: von 18. Ins 21. Jahrhundert* with the original English title of *Building a Bridge from the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future*, 2000.

³⁹ Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters*, 83.

led to a fatal flaw of inequality and inhumanity which we continue to see manifesting even today around the world.

Considering this, there is an even more compelling necessity for a Second Enlightenment. This time around, though, philosophy can and should take a more practical and humane direction, supporting the “pursuit of freedom and happiness” not just for one’s own people, religion, nation or continent, but for all.

Perhaps the teachings of the unique schools of Çārvāka, Buddhism, Khayyam and Rumi among others can help remedy this weakness, if brought forward in a Second Enlightenment in the same way the European Enlightenment thinkers referred to Epicurus and Lucretius. To integrate the prime ideas of these philosophies into a fresher and fuller interpretation of European philosophical and intellectual culture might bring the West and Asia and Africa closer to each other in an attempt to bring about a broader global Enlightenment – a gradual liberation from dogma of all kinds, in a true sense.

Liberation Philosophy Today: Çārvāka, Buddhism, Khayyam and Rumi as “New” Sources for a Second Enlightenment

We have seen how ancient Epicureanism wielded a great influence on the revolution of thought in the Western Renaissance-Enlightenment. Thus, the great focus and challenge of this century will be to explore whether the East is also capable of relying on its past philosophical traditions in order to salvage modern, secular, rational and democratic ideals, and whether the West as well as other parts of the world can also continue to progress by tapping into the wisdom of the ancient East. Let us then, in the context of the Second Enlightenment, put the empirical and advanced ideas of Çārvākas, Buddhist, Khayyam and Rumi in perspective.

A pioneering empirical and pragmatic philosophy emerged with the emergence of the Çārvāka school in the Indian subcontinent around the 6th century BCE. The proponents of this important school put forward several powerful practical ideas which were progressive back then, and forward-thinking even in our modern times.

Their epistemology was an empirical one, similar to what John Locke and David Hume adopted in the Enlightenment period. The experience of the sensory system is a valid perception of the world and the immediate reality with which one is surrounded. For the Çārvākas as well as for Hume and Locke, all other speculations, testimonies, interpretations, sacred texts and what priests claimed were invalid sources for our knowledge of the world. Fundamentally, as Locke argued, direct experience is the most evident knowledge that needs no further proof, a conception

which is no different from the Çārvākas' naturalism.⁴⁰ In broader terms, the epistemology of the Çārvākas, Buddhist, Locke and Hume are extremely close to each other.⁴¹ The knowledge of *self* over metaphysics or god is the epicenter of a remarkable philosophy which was represented by Hume and Buddhism,⁴² not to mention the Çārvāka philosophy. The Çārvākas as a whole offered enough potent and logical ideas that they could have been a vehicle of Enlightenment some 2,000 years ago.

The question is whether the Çārvākas' once-powerful philosophy can make a return, not just in the form of a few websites or scholarly monographs, but in such a way that Asian, European, and other non-European social and political thinkers of today could draw upon the Çārvākas' intellectual achievements. Perhaps the similarities between Çārvākas, Epicureanism and empiricism of Locke and Hume are not coincidence but suggest a prototypical, perhaps even archetypal, model of the human craving to know based on the experience of the world in an empirical manner, moment to moment.

Buddhism too, was and is a philosophical powerhouse, out of which an evolutionary and empirical philosophy emerged. Although Buddhism in the course of centuries has turned into various religious traditions, as a philosophy it emphasizes *thinking*, not merely *believing*. The core of such thinking, as discussed in chapter 6, deals with an empirical self. This school of philosophy frees people by emphasizing there is no need to *believe* in any truth.

In its 2500-year old history, Buddhism has been mixed with many indigenous cultures and native religions and is still largely entangled with truth-based and religious attitudes. However, new secular approaches may have certain success in salvaging the major didactic aspects of this shrewd philosophical stream, such as, the inner workings of the mind and the notion of emptiness.

In enhancing the detailed discussion of Buddhist liberation philosophy, the six-point summary below may help us better appreciate understand secular Buddhist principles and their applicability on a broader intellectual level for our modern times:

1. **Interdependence and Compassion:** The reminder of the interdependence of all things, brings with it a responsibility, a sense of others in the world. This critical principle of interdependence among all beings plays a major role in overcoming the 'us vs. them' mental trap that has led to so much human suffering.

⁴⁰ Dale Maurice Riepe, *The Naturalistic Tradition in Indian Thought*, (1961; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1964), 63-64.

⁴¹ Riepe, *The Naturalistic Tradition in Indian Thought*, 63. See also Arunjit Gill, "In Search of Intuitive Knowledge: A Comparison of Eastern and Western Epistemology," Doctoral Dissertation submitted to Simon and Fraser University, Canada, 2006, 18-19. Online PDF.

⁴² Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters*, 126-29.

2. **Buddhist Psychology of Happiness and Individual Freedom:** The central goal of Buddhism is liberation from all sources of entrapment, be it self or religion. Thus, deep joy and equanimity in life is the end goal.
3. **Rejection of Absolutism, and Embrace of Impermanence:** Buddhism rejects dogmatism, including the rejection of supernatural claims, and the idea of absolute truth. The Buddha considered suspect any *truth* that would point to an entity as real, fixed, infallible, finality, ultimate, or a solution forever.⁴³ Due to impermanency, all things of the world are in the state of flux, and no-thing remains fixed and final forever. Pleasure is therefore the result of an awareness of each moment rather than clinging to things that will produce anxiety
4. **Logic and Epistemology:** Buddhism is both empirical and rational. The *pramana* or the *proof* of the world is not based on abstract or metaphysical truth-claims. It is based on two empirical criteria – sensory perception and deductive reasoning. Such epistemology can help reduce dependence on supernatural or mythical claims which so often lead to divisive and ambiguous belief systems. This and similar empirical-rational systems of knowledge can enhance the prospect of a new universal Enlightenment.
5. **Ontology of Emptiness:** The transition from one moment to another, from one state to the next, suggests the lack of an absolute state. Instead, such never-ending transitions point to an impersonal mechanism in the larger interdependent world. Self-perpetuating mechanical laws lead all things to the point of their annihilation, and the rise of new things. Nothing remains permanently itself. The concept of emptiness in Buddhist dialectics continues to be an intriguing theme for the modern theoretical physicists and a theme for deeper intellectual as well as scientific explorations.
6. **Death is Final:** The notion of parinirvana is a complete dissolution of body and mind with the final exit from the cycle of existence – all traces will be irreversibly destroyed. Parinirvana should have put an end to any fantasies or speculative beliefs of return to life. The Buddha found it irrelevant and unpragmatic to ponder about heaven and hell, reward and punishment. Among all uncertainties, two things are certain from the Buddhist point of view: the present time to live pleasurably, and death.

Unlike Buddhism, Khayyam's philosophy did not become a religion, and in fact thoroughly countered religion and religious thinking. His poetical philosophy, despite its incredible potential for enlightenment due to its non-religious themes, was considered abhorrent by the religious

⁴³ See Stephen Batchelor, *After Buddhism: Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 118-120.

establishment and various medieval authors.⁴⁴ In fact, free and dialectical philosophy after the time of Khayyam sank to its lowest level. With the emergence of the dogmatic philosophy of al-Ghazzālī in the twelfth century and the propagation of a number of theological streams of thought, the chance for the Khayyamian philosophy to take root in intellectual and free-thinking circles was largely repressed and gradually lost ground altogether over the course of centuries.⁴⁵

It is not at all difficult to see similarities parallels between Khayyam and the philosophers of Çārvākas, the Buddha, Epicurus, and Lucretius. Although typically thought of as a poet, Khayyam stands alongside these philosophers not only as regards his empirical-rationalist philosophy but also with his scientific achievements. Given his high achievements in the sciences of his time along with his lucid philosophy, he could easily be designated as a prime architect of Eastern Enlightenment whose time was completely missed. Khayyam belonged to the epoch of 800-1,200 CE which encompassed an intellectual region whose Golden Age pioneers of mathematics, astronomy, music, medicine, art, poetry and philosophy collectively could have brought about an extraordinary Central Asian Enlightenment. But due to political and religious demagoguery, the demise of intellectualism became inevitable and thus the downfall of a *Lost Enlightenment in Central Asia*.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Khayyam stood tall as one of the last great Central Asian scholars whose poetry is still guiding us.

Given that content of his well-equipped and philosophically loaded poetry, Khayyam could also be considered the groundbreaker of Process Philosophy in the Persianate and Islamic world, whose focus is to study the dynamic and changing nature of reality. The ancient giants such as Heraclitus, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu were the forerunners of Alfred North Whitehead and William James among the prominent Process Philosophers of modern times.

Thus, we can see how relevant Khayyam's foundational principles are for an emerging Enlightenment, both in the East and the West:

⁴⁴ See many available works on the biography of Khayyam, namely Mehdi Aminrazavi, *The Wine of Wisdom: The Life, Poetry and Philosophy of Omar Khayyam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 40-66.

⁴⁵ The ongoing tyrannical environment undermined philosophy as well as the culture of scientific research. The destruction of many valuable philosophical and unruly works such as the works Ibn Rāwandī (d. 911) and Zakarīyā Rāzī (d. 925) among others by fanatical religious rulers left little chance for further intellectual exploration and debates. See Vaziri, *Buddhism in Iran*, 170-172. See also Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rawandi, Abu Bakr al-Razi and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden/Boston/Koln: Brill, 1999). Thus, Sufism and poetry became outlets for the literati to express their shrewdest intellectual and spiritual experiences. The dying philosophical tradition in Iran made a strong return with the School of Isfahan in the seventeenth century, but this revival was short-lived as the hard-core theologians of the time and those who followed suppressed such challenging philosophies, and dogmatic theologians even demonized research in the areas of mathematics and chemistry in particular.

⁴⁶ S. Fredrick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). Starr basically argues that it was the Central Asian scientists and thinkers who by and large brought about the Golden Age between 800 to 1,200 CE, not the commonly known Arabs of Arabia. Since these Central Asians wrote their works in Arabic language and any Arabic work would be associated with the Arab-Islamic culture of Baghdad, it became a common misnomer by calling it Arab or even Islamic Golden Age, which in fact it should be known as the Central Asian Golden Age.

1. **Humanism:** Cognitive growth and human dignity in the Khayyamian world means to uproot ignorance and illusory beliefs of return to life. Freedom and happiness is above all the knowledge of metaphysics.
2. **Empiricism:** Khayyam's empiricism vividly emphasized human sensory observation and the real experience of how the world operates. The existential processes of construction and demolition seem to be the rule. In his natural philosophy, Khayyam treated nothing beyond the physical world, life and the experience of joy.
3. **Rationalism:** His rationalism took into consideration logical physics. To avoid treating matters of life with emotionalism, Khayyam supported utilizing logic to deduce the unalterable laws of existence and the irreversible laws of biology.
4. **Skepticism:** Khayyam remained emphatically skeptical about metaphysical and religious truth claims and speculations. The utopia of immortality and a better life in the underworld of afterlife met his strongest ridicule and criticism. Any knowledge that contradicts the experience of here and now even though claimed by holy people as truths must be suspected.
5. **Hedonism: The Joy of Now;** Khayyam prioritized the awareness of here and now and the realness of this life. He dialectically tried to remove the clashing paradox of constant joy-sadness in human emotions by resolving and replacing it with a higher understanding of natural processes.

Khayyam's philosophy can undoubtedly be catalogued as timeless and universal. Insightfully, he detected a universal psychological friability among the crowd which needed to be purged. He saw how some become highly religious with the hope of influencing the course of affairs through prayers and intercession and bargaining with god, ignoring the fact that no natural law can be abandoned for the sake of some expressive wishes. By undoing the old nagging mind, Khayyam introduced a robust attitude of living freely and wholeheartedly. He advised embracing a life similar to that of a flower: it buds, blossoms, radiates its fragrance and beauty through joyful living, accepts its impermanency, and withers away without clinging. The gorgeous flower that once was vanishes from the face of existence without regret or memories, and yet has graced the earth with its color, scent, and being, and through its interaction with the rest of the world.

Khayyam's poetry had already initiated an "Age of Reason" in his time and geography the way Lucretius's writings did in his. Khayyam's poetical legacy with its unprecedented imageries and messages prompted and influenced a new genre of literature in Persian. His philosophy demands a rescue from its stagnant position to a dynamic everyday life. As a thinker with an unbreachable universal logic and realism, he brilliantly bridges Western Epicureanism with Eastern Zen.

Khayyam's teachings can support the intellectual progress of the future and be one of the key sources of the new Enlightenment.

Rumi: A Secular Enlightener

It is important to briefly mention Rumi, the great Persian poet of the thirteenth century, in the list of Enlightening men of Asia.⁴⁷ The relevance of Rumi in today's world may be assessed from two perspectives: 1. After almost 800 years, he has made an incredible comeback in the popular East-West popular culture. 2. His iconoclastic and secular thinking resonates with the modern political and social ideals of the twenty first century as delineated in this book.

Here, for our purposes, it is important to emphasize a few key points relevant to the context of liberation philosophy Rumi represented. Liberation first found a true meaning in Rumi's personal life when at age 37 he experienced that life-transforming meeting with Shams. Rumi then abandoned his profession and scholastic circle, fearlessly rebelling against his past and his culture's ancestral belief system. His new approach to life symbolized a first step to self-liberation.

Over the course of years, Rumi toiled to reinvent himself despite his clash with the theological establishment and the fervent Sufi circle around him. By ignoring such clashes, he went on to produce magnificent literature that laid a pioneering and inclusive foundation for human evolution. Over 60,000 verses of poetry backed his new reasoning of life. By immersing in the world of cognitive experiences, he realized self-liberation is simply a conduit to liberate others. His secularism, humanism and universalism are his most forceful messages that are reflected in the verses of his *Divan* and *Masnavi*.⁴⁸

At some point Rumi became aware of the limitation and failure of religion in being exclusivist and non-egalitarian. The declaration of inclusivism and universalism in religions is inherently meant to believe in and follow these religions, not to doubt them. Islam, like some other religions, not only excludes those who do not belong to the faith but also takes a harsh position against the infidels, apostates and heretics. Without any ambiguity, Rumi composed hundreds of poems in his *Divan* and *Masnavi* to in fact *include* the infidels (*kāfir*), apostates, heretics, non-

⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of Rumi and Shams, see Mostafa Vaziri, *Rumi and Shams' Silent Rebellion: Parallels with Vedanta, Buddhism and Shaivism*, (New York & London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015). Those who have linked Rumi narrowly with Sufism and Islamic mysticism have done him a disservice. This labeling has obscured his ideals of secularism, universalism and humanism, and his role as a liberation philosopher. As happened with Khayyam, Rumi's contribution to philosophy and a broader sociocultural renaissance in the Islamic world was missed. Instead, after his death Rumi was anachronistically reduced to being the "founder of Mevlevi Sufi order". The error in lumping the universality of Rumi's and his teacher Shams' universal philosophies and their erudite rebellion into the simple category of 'Sufism' have been fully discussed in a separate book. See Vaziri, *Rumi and Shams' Silent Rebellion*.

⁴⁸ His production of *Masnavi*, is nothing short of an encyclopedia; a unique integration of literature and anecdotes from many different regions and cultures about so many useful social themes from around the world. His *Masnavi* is a master work and impressive scholarship; a work to wake the monolithic thinkers up.

Muslims, and all ethnic groups of humanity known to him from Zanzibar of Africa to the Romans, Indians, Turks, Persians and others – all as one *secular* human family without denominational or ethnic discrimination. Rumi, as a wise and critical thinker did not want to take sides, and welcomed universal equality for humanity without keeping Islam or Sufism as his criteria. His anti-violence message was also universal, heralding to protect all sentient beings, including plants. His cardinal message was that all humanity receives their life not through their native gods or their parochial surroundings but through a universal source, Love,⁴⁹ a source to which we all belong. This is the reason for which that Rumi's transcultural appeal has enjoyed an unprecedented triumph over the centuries.

He defied religious severities and self-righteousness. His continuous defiance bothered the theologians of his time. Due to their horror at witnessing Rumi playing musical instruments, dancing, and adopting a receptive attitude towards heretics and non-Muslims, the religious orthodoxy of the time gave him several warnings.

Nevertheless, by re-establishing the culture of music in human life after years of rejection by the Islamic theological establishment of the time, Rumi laid a new foundation for generations to tune in to the moving and exhilarating sound of music. The large number of his poems on the subject of happiness (*shādī*) makes him a philosopher who, like Epicurus and Khayyam, fostered the cultivation of tranquility and freedom as a pleasurable state of being. The primacy of self took precedence over god. Moreover, Rumi's humanist position supplanted any religious and ethnic discrimination, a rather modern approach to human value for the difficult century he lived in. This egalitarianism and universalism are repeatedly emphasized in Rumi's philosophical poetry.

In his collection of poetry, he brings certain disarray in the Islamic monotheistic thinking, sometimes the world is god, other times Shams is god, or self is god and sometimes there is even no god. Through this language play with heterogeneous meanings he brought monotheism into a certain disarray. He confronted the purity-seeking men of religion by using profanity. Even leaving out Rumi's metaphoricity, paradoxality and contradictability,⁵⁰ we must acknowledge that he radically de-emotionalized the religious and mystically-oriented mindset. He did this to show us that in living in this real world with all its diverse people, we should not allow mystical states take over in an anesthetizing way but rather we should harness and make use of these spiritual experiences in solving problems. Rumi has a highly esteemed place in the West in modern times because his language is the language of Enlightenment and cosmopolitanism.

⁴⁹ Love is defined to be a nameless, placeless, timeless and immortal field of energy, a force of life which makes life and its beauties manifest themselves. For an alternative discussion and meaning of "Love" in the Rumian context see, Vaziri, *Rumi and Shams' Silent Rebellion*, 85-96.

⁵⁰ "Metaphorizität," "Paradoxalität," "Widersprüchlichkeit," borrowing ideas and these terms from Reinhard Margreiter, *Erfahrung und Mystik: Grenzen der Symbolisierung*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 68.

Rumi's prodigious philosophy, similar to those of the other philosophers addressed in this book, focused on emancipating the natural self from the fictitious self and the deception of the everyday social-cultural environment. His philosophy of mind advocates a sensible and healthy psyche which knows its own makeup as well as the nature of the world. Rumi addressed the mind's dangerous propensity to run after ideas, opinions and beliefs while seeking distractions and temporary anchors. He saw that religious impulsiveness causes a moving away from the center of one's own existence. In transcending thousands of years of cultural and religious beliefs, Rumi sought to locate the natural mind of the universe, free from beliefs buried in the human mind. The emanation of this pure and wise mind is the primordial mind of the universe, *Love*. Thus, the primacy of locating the natural self over metaphysics, and valuing scrupulous thinking over sentimental mysticism, remained the focus of the poetry of this master of liberation.

Rumi's philosophical and social positions are the most appealing in his poetry especially when they address the dilemmas of this turbulent and tribalistic century:

1. **Universalism and cosmopolitanism:** All ethnicities, all cultures, all people of the world belong to the same human family. To Rumi, different skin colors, traditions and languages are nothing but a façade.
2. **Secularism:** Keeping religious dogma, discrimination and stigmatization out of intercultural and human affairs – dismantling the use and application of the label *heretics* or *heresy* in public and private spheres.
3. **Humanism:** Dissolving the hardest of dogmas in the alchemy of Love – the longing for coexistence not out of force but out of loving one another, the world and nature.
4. **Non-Violence and Environmental Respect:** Violence among nations and religious communities is absolutely discouraged by Rumi. Non-violence also includes going beyond human affairs. One should not cut trees or damage nature as we and nature are interwoven.
5. **Promotion of the Culture of Music and Dance:** In playing several musical instruments and performing dance, Rumi was a strong proponent of this performing art in human society, regardless of religious or cultural inhibitions.
6. **Personal Freedom and Independent Thinking:** Individuals are free to make choices and be able to reinvent themselves – liberation of self from the self and from the entanglement of taxing social and religious conventions – the way he did in his time.

Final Reflections

The key concepts in the four Asian schools of Çārvākas, Buddhism, Khayyam and Rumi range from the psychological to the existential. These concepts in conducive circumstances have great potential to be developed on the individual as well as on broader sociopolitical life. These

philosophies carry a wide range of intellectual application in the modern world without misplacing the achievements of modernity. Until these philosophies take root on broader social, political, economic and scientific levels in the same way Epicureanism evolved and spread during the Enlightenment, it falls to individuals to make changes by modernizing and secularizing Buddhist principles, for example, or creatively reviving Çārvāka, Khayymian and Rumian principles through empirical lenses. The purpose of this modernization and secularization is to make these ideas more viable for the broader multicultural and rational needs of our ever-evolving societies.

As we have explored, over the course of history literally thousands of religious claims have served to appease the fear and emotional vulnerability of individuals and groups around the globe. At the same time, these same religious systems have also caused the suffering of their opponents, including the secular thinkers. Despite such sufferings caused by religions and religious people, progressive people have been chivalrous and gracious towards religious claims, endorsing our world to be a place of multiculturalism and religious pluralism for the sake of peace and harmony. And generally speaking, the current generation of anthropologists and social scientists have also tried to understand cultures and religions as respectfully as they could without offending the followers.

Yet the vast and at times irreconcilable differences in our religious traditions continue to cause clashes and stereotyping. Dictators and religious authorities still have much power, and in some cases have the authority to order the shedding of the blood of their opponents under the guise of defending the interest of the so-called tribe, land or god. We know where this tribal thinking comes from, its ancient submission to myth and power still so ingrained in many human minds. Thus, technological *modernization* alone is not enough. Empirical thinking, laws, social justice, gender equality, human value and pursuit of happiness are the fruits of *modern thinking*. Enlightenment, reform, and a deeper understanding of our current circumstances are indispensable necessities, not optional laidback choices. On a broader level, many pending issues that still need to be resolved include; gender equality, human value, human rights,⁵¹ self-determination, animal rights, removal of religious and political dictatorships, preventing female genital mutilation, equitable distribution of wealth, healthcare for everyone, abolishing war including complete disarmament and denuclearization, all the way to domestication of our personal and national greed.

⁵¹ Much of the world still lacks democratic process, intellectual freedom and religious freedom; there is still abject human exploitation, despotism, and the absence of universal tools protecting human values and human rights, let alone gender equality. Any radical improvements in regards to human values and human rights, of course must first take place locally before going universal. For a broader and a more structural debate on Asian values, Islamic system of thinking in regards to human rights and human value, see Marie-Luisa Frick, *Menschenrechte und Menschenwerte: Zur konzeptionellen Belastbarkeit der Menschenrechtsidee in ihrer globalen Akkomodation* (Weilerswist-Metternich: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2017). For future discussions, see Marie-Luisa Frick, *Human Rights and Universal Relativism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Now a greater task lies ahead in order to vigorously tackle our disagreements, particularly our discriminatory and religious conflicts. Using simplistic jargon such as embracing “religious harmony” and “religious pluralism” to address this field of profound human conflict that is rife with serious confrontation only serves to prolong the problem.⁵² The Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, also finds the idea of “religious differences” hard to deal with, saying, “It is time for all the religious Chiefs to meet openly, and not in secret as happened some time previously.” He favors a global summit to resolve the religious conflicts. But then he detects the nature of “religious differences” are inherently “paradoxical” and hard to reconcile.⁵³ The Dalai Lama makes the point about the “paradox” of our religious differences (himself included) while longing for peace despite them. This paradox and religious division will remain unless there is a universal shift in dropping individual dogma, be it the Buddha, Moses, Jesus or Mohammad. Pacifying the religious dogmas on a global level and finding common logic will have to come to the fore in order for people and religious leaders to transcend these dogmas of gods, religions, and parochial inflexible beliefs.

Liberation philosophy does not mean making an ambivalent choice of one idea or another for one’s intellectual hobby, or liberation of oneself, but is a cognitive tool to think of peace and liberation on a collective level. It is a deeper understanding of interdependence and empathy for others. Liberation means perhaps to snap out of our ‘medieval minds,’ whether in the West or the East, and orient ourselves towards a more scrupulous, non-persecutory and non-divisive attitude in understanding issues and people. It is the triumph of ethical reason over dishonorable irresponsibility, from our personal choices all the way to our public life.

Introducing a new order of reasoning is exactly when philosophy can play a mature and practical role in the development of a society. Offering universal reasoning with an adjusted secular language can help ordinary people to apply their minds to attend everyday psychological or social issues. For example, *nirvana* no longer need be perceived as something abstract that is barely understood, or something haphazardly ethereal that can only be experienced in a cave. It is no longer enough for meditation towards the attainment of nirvana to consist of repeating the

⁵² Ulrich Beck, the contemporary German sociologist, coined the term “risk society” (*Risikogesellschaft*) when writing about the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, noting the fact that neither the rich nor the poor can escape horrendous global and local crises. Problems of modernity, pollution, inequality, lack of knowledge, and insecurity are risks and side effects of standard and poorly developed modernization. Leaving the poor destitute and the illiterate unschooled enhances risk on a global level. In the Beckian context, superstition and fanaticism have increased level. The term “risk society” was coined by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens in the 1980s. For more details see, Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

⁵³ This is part of a letter put out by the Dalai Lama’s office in Dharamsala: “H.H. the Dalai Lama has directly mentioned the necessary presence of the highly admired Catholic Pope, saying (during the Livestream) that it is time for all the religious Chiefs to meet openly and not in secret, as happened some time previously. This Summit should be held in order to analyze together what to do, with the purpose of cooling down all fighting, reducing and then extinct all of those conflicts, paradoxically based on the religious differences (!) of which the human history is tragically witness.” The source of this letter is: Subject: From Dharamsala – In a couple of worldly proposals put forward on 25 October 21018 by H. H. the XIVth Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyasto, at his personal residence in Dharamsala (Himachal Pradesh) India.

mantra of “may all sentient beings know peace” without actually taking action. The significance of nowness and reality of the world demands a concrete and pragmatic reasoning within such reality not outside of it. As Thomas Merton once eloquently said, in cautioning Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike: “A purely mental life may be destructive if it leads us to substitute thought for life and ideas for actions.”⁵⁴

The advantage we have over our ancestors is that in our modern global setting we are more literate than ever and can free ourselves from the bondage of myths, existential fear, and keep our emotionality over our native gods and holy scriptures at bay. Literacy and scientific-intellectual progress have brought us to a point where we are able to read, learn, reflect and even rewire our brain in order to become free-thinkers and be awakened to our responsibilities in the interconnected world around us. The ancient philosophers taught us that the pleasure of life comes when fear and dogma is replaced with insightful knowledge. As Epicurus said: “It would be impossible to banish fear on matters of the highest importance if a person did not know the nature of the whole world but lived in dread of what the legends tell us.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1999), 16.

⁵⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (London: William Heinemann and New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1925), X, 667.