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The Birth of the Idea of Historical Subject

Narodziny idei podmiotu historycznego

Рождение идеи исторического субъекта

THE IDEA OF THE AUTONOMY OF THE HISTORICAL WORLD AND ITS LIMITATIONS IN THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN THOUGHT

Let us begin by recalling a few statements: "I am part of a whole governed by Nature" [1] says Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*. And it is not accidental that, as one of the last sages of the passing world, he goes on saying that all that is going on now has already happened before [2], thereby expressing his conviction that nothing new can enter the perennial rhythm of cyclical transformations, to which history is submitted [3]. Two centuries later, the chief theoretician of the new world, built on the ruins of the ancient ideals and values, will write that "states arise among people only through Divine Providence" [4], thus bringing the role of supernatural interference in historical reality to such an extreme formula that even the "duration and results of each war depend on the Divine will" [5]. After over a millennium, while analyzing man's situation, Montaigne will, hold that "everything is subject to one law and one fate" [6]

[1] Marcus Aurelius: *Mediations* — Polish transl. *Rozmyślania*, Warszawa 1958, p. 177.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[3] See also Chrysippus in: H. van Arnim: *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, Leipzig 1903—1905, Vol. II, nos. 623 and 625.

[4] Augustine of Hippo: *De Civitate Dei* — Polish transl. *Państwo boże*, vol. 1, Poznań 1930, p. 305.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

[6] M. Montaigne: *Essais* — Polish transl. *Próby*, vol. II, Warszawa 1957, pp. 267—268.

whose name is Nature, and will conclude therefrom that man's historically changing convictions, beliefs, views etc. are governed by it, that "they have their turns, their time, their birth and death just like cabbage" [7]. A similar insight will acquire a full theoretical formulation when Spencer tries to derive the whole of sociology from the principle that "...the law of organic development is at the same time the law of all development" [8]. In the 20th century. Spengler will maintain that "cultures, the highest forms of the living beings, grow... like flowers in the field, they belong to living Nature like plants and animals" [9]. And very recently words will be uttered which, by virtue of their authorship, express the official contents of a certain doctrine: "The Catholic Church knows that all events develop according to the will and order of the Divine Providence, and that God realizes his goals in history... God indeed governs hitory.[10]

Statements like those could be infinitely multiplied. The sources quoted show that they have been drawn from various epochs and theories, often contrasting as much as St. Augustine's theology and Montaigne's scepticism, or the doctrine of the Catholic Church and Spengler's vision of the approaching cultural catastrophe.

And yet it is easy to discern that these theoretical perspectives so very far apart reveal one common feature. Regardless of their philosophical background, be it religious consciousness or its antinomy, the naturalist conception of the world, this feature lies in a conviction that at any rate it is not man who makes the social and historical reality of his own. There is common consent that this reality is formed by forces alien to man and dominating him, against which he is powerless because he himself is subject to their action. The fundamental controversy between those conceptions could and did concern only the question whether the factor which determines the historically changing human world is Nature or Divine Providence. They are, however, obviously united by the jointly accepted assumption denying man an active history-making role. In the above conceptions man is treated exclusively as the passive object of history around him rather than as its active subject creating the historical reality of his own.

The awareness of the history-making role of human action had to

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 320.

[8] H. Spencer: *Progress: Its Law and Cause in His Essays Scientific Political and Speculative*, New York 1981, p. 9—10.

[9] O. Spengler: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, München 1927, vol. I, p. 28.

[10] Discours de Sa Sainteté le Pape Pié XII au X-ème Congrès International des sciences historiques, 7 septembre, Cité du Vatican, 1955, p. 8. Quoted after I. Kon: *Idealizm filozoficzny i kryzys burżuazyjnej myśli historycznej*, Warszawa 1967, p. 261.

develop in dual opposition. The first condition for it to develop was the liberation of the human mind from the tradition of Christian providentialism, which subjected man to variously understood Providence. This condition was basically fulfilled in the Renaissance. Starting from that epoch, providentialist conceptions in their relatively pure, theological forms like that of Bossuet [11] or, at present, of R. Niebuhr [12], and formerly in the writings of the representatives of the Catholic traditionalist thought of the Restoration like Bonald or de Maistre, clearly function only on the peripheries of the main trend of modern philosophy. Also, transformed into entirely different and original theoretical structures, like with Vico, Herder, or even with Hegel, they have completely lost their initial content, most often through immanentization of the ideal factor into the world of human values.

The other condition of the discovery of the history-making rôle of human activity was to recover the principles of man's autonomy towards the new whole, Nature, into which man was inscribed the moment modern thought was freed from the pressure of the whole theological tradition. And although certain insights in this field occurred in earlier philosophy [13], their theoretical reception was negligible, the decisive role falling to the late 16th century thought and the next two centuries. And the more the materialist tendency at that time became strengthened in its mechanistic form, which subjected man equally with the whole Nature to necessary and universal laws, the more complicated, on the one hand, were the theoretical circumstances limiting man's possible autonomy, while on the other hand, the more urgent was the need to determine it.

Despite its theoretical diversity as exemplified by such different methodological attitudes as those of Bacon, Descartes, or Hobbes, the modern thought, begins with reflexion on the nature of human cognition and with the search in certains structures and modes of thinking for the sources of the objective validity of the knowledge of the world. Descartes' *cogito* as a starting point of cognitive reflexion directed towards the world expresses a conviction, fairly common in the philosophy of that

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[11] J. B. Bossuet: *Discours sur l'histoire universelle à Monseigneur le Dauphin: pour expliquer la suite de la religion et les changements des empires*, Paris 1681.

[12] R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, New York 1941—43, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, New York 1955.

[13] The formulation of the opposition of the dual mode of the existence of things, by the laws of nature and by man's institution, which had already been undertaken by the Sophists, was particularly significant. Chapter V of *De rerum natura* by Lucretius is also wholly devoted to the praise of the results of human activity. See L. Edelstein: *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity*, Baltimore 1967.

time, that it is in the human mind itself that we should find the foundations of accounting for all assertions, not only about the properties of reality, but even about its existence. The ascription to intellect of such a role that assumes, at least in the epistemological order, its primacy over all cognitive contents which make up the image of the world, apart from the fact that it was soon to be also transferred on to the ontological plane, delineated a certain specific perspective of man's autonomy. It was expressed in a conviction that human thinking was endowed, one way or another, depending on the theoretical contexts in which this thinking was included, with a special power, namely the power of reproducing in itself, or in some cases seemingly of producing outside itself, the true nature of reality. In this conviction, which subjected the whole world to the power of human thinking and the only possible authority of human reason, not only was the awareness of man's autonomy in relation to reality. It was not only oxpressed in the proud formula of *cogito ergo sum*, which saw the principle of man's specific existence in the act of thinking itself, and, at the same time the only starting point of all knowledge about reality. This can be found in Pascal, otherwise remotest from any apologetics of human reason, when, full of humility in the face of the infinity of being, he nevertheless writes: "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed." [14]

Thinking, which finds the whole world in itself, becomes therefore the principle, upon which, already in its beginnings, the modern thought bases the idea of man's autonomy against reality no matter whether this is the reality of Bacon's and Hobbes', or of Descartes' and Pascal's. In that way the other condition was fulfilled, without which it was impossible to discover the subjective, creative role of human activity in historical process.

And yet, it seems, this kind of autonomization of man in the world, which finds the specificity of human existence exclusively in psychic activity or, more precisely, in thinking itself, did not open any easy prospects for the discovery of the principles of man's history-making activity. Indeed, despite all difficulties, it permitted to outline a certain special conception of the historical subject and to recognize the specific character of the human world, but this attempt to construct a consistent resultant theory of historical reality was, however, doomed to failure.

The first obstacle on the way of deducing from man's autonomy thus conceived also the idea of the autonomous character of his historical world was that the epistemological foundations of valuable knowledge were sought solely in the structure of the individual cognitive subject.

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[14] B. Pascal, *The Provincial Letters. Pensees. Scientific Treatises*, ed. M. Hutchins, Chicago—Toronto—London 1952, p. 233.

Descartes finds them not in a general category of thinking but in the analysis of individual thinking — in the analysis of his own Self. Moreover, the condition of the validity of thus derived knowledge is that the subject should first, be made pure deprived of all contents, especially those derived from other people and history. It is only after the subject has been reduced to the act of pure thinking that it can be for itself the source of certainty of his own judgments. This phenomenon is also manifested in Bacon's philosophy, in a different but not less conspicuous way. His theory of idols (epecially *idola specus* and *idola fori*) is nothing else but a discovery that human cognition is a social process [15]; that its contents also reflect the specific character of the social and cultural perspective from which reality is experienced. Yet contrary to the later philosophies of Hegel and Marx and the whole of present-day sociology of knowledge, this discovery, has only a negative meaning for Bacon. It points to the elements that need to be rejected before cognition is reconstructed on the basis of new principles. Although Bacon will discover a certain essential principle of transforming the individual subject into the historical subject, this will occur rather contrary to the postulates of the prior elimination of contents which the subject owes to tradition. Anyway, the demand that cognition should start with a prior deprivation of the subject of all contents leads — both with Bacon and Descartes — to the rejection of the principle of the historical continuation of progress with respect to all hitherto occurring history.[16]

Apart from this individualist and non-historical conception of the cognitive subject itself, another obstacle in transforming the idea manifested in the cognition of man's autonomy into the conception of the autonomy of his historical world was that the aprioristic attitude was established in the 17th century philosophy [17]. To the next in which

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[15] This was observed by K. Mannheim in *Ideologie und Utopie*, Frankfurt a/M 1952, p. 58. In a somewhat different way attention was also drawn to the limitations of Bacon's conception of the cognitive subject by V. A. Ryshko in his essay *Razvitye ponimanya subiekta i obiekta w filosofii novogo vremieni* in *Subiekt i obiekt kak filosofskaya problema*, M. A. Parniuk et al., eds. Kiev 1979, p. 23.

[16] R. V. Sampson bluntly accuses Descartes that he "...divided human history cataclysmically into two epochs — the pre-Cartesian and thus unprogressive epoch and the post-Cartesian epoch of progress, opened up by the Athena-like birth of the Method." R. V. Sampson: *Progress in the Age of Reason. The Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, London 1965, p. 29. Similarly Ch. Frankel: *The Idea of Progress in the French Englihtenment*, New York 1948, p. 23, and H. Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment*, New York 1968, p. 13.

[17] It has been written more on the subject in: Z. J. Czarnecki: *Siedemnastowieczny aprioryzm i problemy historyzmu (The Apriorism of the Seventeenth Century as the Problem of Historism)* in "Studia Filozoficzne" 1978, Nos. 8—9, p. 241—255.

aprioristic systems were consistent with their own assumptions (and this cannot be said of Descartes), they eliminated quite effectively the mere possibility of passing from the individual subject to the collective and historical. Therefore by pointing to the sources of all valuable knowledge in consciousness alone, they reduced the whole process of cognition to deducing logical consequences from what is, even potentially, inherent in the structure of the individual subject. Apriorism in its extreme instances does not need to go beyond consciousness to validate cognition. On the contrary, all searching outside of the consciousness for the sources of knowledge or its value criteria automatically ruled out the tendency to achieve absolute knowledge, peculiar to apriorism. A particular degree of this difficulty can be witnessed in Leibniz's philosophy. On the one hand, in opposition to the mechanistic theory of changes, he created the most dynamic conception of reality at that time: a property of substance is its spontaneous development from unconscious states to the state of the possibly fullest cognition. But this is the point. The recognition of consciousness as the only possible subject of development and of a logical consequence as its scheme, with pluralism at the same time, leads to an only apparently unexpected conclusion that "monads have no windows" and that each one, without contact with other subjects, can only in itself achieve the successive steps of development, that is the stages of cognition. No wonder therefore that Leibniz, one of the first theoreticians of modern thought and a historian, did not even try in his historiographic works to include this category in the description of historical reality, having remained a typical representative of erudite and chronicle-like historiography.[18]

EMPIRICIST PSYCHOLOGY OF COGNITION. FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO HISTORICAL SUBJECT

The difficulties resulting from the autonomization of man exclusively as the subject of thinking and cognition were much easier to overcome from the standpoint of empiricism in those forms that dominanted at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. This holds true both for psychologistic empiricism, as with Locke and his followers, and for such empiricism as constitutes the basis of scientific research. And it is not accidental that these theoretical inspirations led to the transformation of the idea of consciousness as the individual cognitive subject into the conception of

[18] This has been convincingly demonstrated by W. Spitz: *The Significance of Leibniz for Historiography* in "Journal of the History of Ideas", 1952, No. 3, p. 333 and ff. See also F. Meinecke in the classic work *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, München 1965.

the collective subject made up of many human individuals and generations participating in the general process of the development of knowledge. This was possible because in the very idea of empiricism that time there was a conviction that the cognitive contents were in a way derived from the outside, in Berkeley's extremely case even from God; that every cognitive act has the underlying irruption of new data into the structure of consciousness, no matter whether some kind of adequacy regarding the properties of reality itself was attributed to the data, as was most often the case or, as Hume did, more sceptical conclusions were stopped short at. Empiricism assumed, as it were, the dependence of the subject upon the extra-subjective world interpreted, we may add, most often in a mechanistic and naturalist way. Man's autonomy was revealed not as discovering in himself the source of the fundamental content of cognition, which apriorism tended to do, but only on the level of their transformation either into conceptual structures filling any consciousness (psychological trend) or into the initial material and directives of theory--making activity (methodological trend).

Keeping in mind the fact that the two variants of empiricism are most often complementary, and that, especially in the 18th century French philosophy, they are only two aspects of the same theoretical attitude, for the sake of clarity let us consider separately their share in the formation of the idea of collective subject in history.

Inasmuch as the conviction that man's part is to create new things, or even the notion itself of becoming indispensable in all attempts to historicize man's world, was difficult to derive from aprioristic philosophy, as evidenced by Leibniz and Spinoza [19], this conviction inheres directly in the assumptions of psychologistic, genetic empiricism. If the foundations of all possible knowledge were to be hidden in the human mind, the whole process of cognition is merely either revealing those hidden dispositions or discovering necessary logical connections between the ideas formed by these dispositions. If, however, the human mind resembles a clean white sheet of paper at the beginning, like Locke's "white paper void of all characters, without any ideas" [20], or "on empty room" [21], then every new experience is not only the next source of new imprints on that paper, but it somehow modifies its state. For it is nothing but a total sum of the received experiences structured into appropriate

[19] The extremely individualistic treatment of the subject in Spinoza's thought has been shown by B. Suchodolski: *Rozwój nowożytnej filozofii człowieka, (The Rise of Modern Philosophy of Man)*, Warszawa 1967.

[20] J. Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding I*, 2, Hutchinson, Chicago—London—Toronto 1952, p. 121.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

psychical wholes: concepts, judgments, valuations etc. This originally white paper, void of all characters, to continue the metaphor, will gradually acquire its identity with time. Sensation is the only given disposition here, and admittedly given somewhat *a priori*, while it is only experience that crates new reality and a definite cognitive subject. At the beginning the subject is nothing because it is only a possibility to determine the content of reality through the actions to which he is subjected. He becomes what it is, or rather he becomes incessantly. The Condillac's statue is at first what he feels at the moment — the experienced content alone: the fragrance of a rose, when its first and only sensation is its smell. And then in turn "...the smell of clove, jasmin, violet, in accordance with the object stimulating its organ".[22] Only as a consequence of sensations and the accumulation of their contents new psychic functions are born in him, other than sensation itself: memory, ability to compare, experiencing pleasure and pain etc. Thus appears the entry into time and we have to do with history, still individual but already history.

In that way the empiricist psychology of cognition creates the premises of quite a new theory of development, which in fact is the only theory of development in the 18th century if we assume that in aprioristic conceptions, as for example in Leibniz's philosophy, development as formation not derived from earlier assumptions and dispositions was not possible. The new theory also gives the idea of development a definite shape which will be preserved in the thought of the Enlightenment as the theory of cumulative process. In accordance with the mechanistic inspirations of this type of psychology, it was to be a process of gradual transformations in which new and more and more complex structures could arise as a result of only quantitative accumulation of data and information. Although in the two presented conceptions (those by Locke and by Condillac) the analyzed subject of development is still the indiivdual one, the human mind alone, yet by making the subject open, as it were, to external influence and by deriving the mind-forming process itself therefrom, empiricism opened the subject to actions of other men. There was therefore discovered the possibility of contact between the psychical monads seemingly inaccessible to one another. These monads, formerly doomed to selfdevelopment only according to the previously established harmony or, as in the occasionalist-Berkeleyan variant, subject to the action of God alone, opened towards one another. With such a conception of cognition as the result of a direct bond between consciousness and the external world, and comprising not only a simple relation of the natural phenomena-consciousness type but also a more complex interrelation between

[22] E. B. Condillac: *Traité des sensations*, — Polish transl., *Traktat o wrażeniach*, Warszawa 1957, p. 11.

such elements as a) natural phenomena, b) consciousness, c) material exteriorization of its contents, d) the consciousnes of another man, there was nothing in the way against the conclusion about the process of cognition taking place in the general subject — an aggregate of individuals to suggest itself.

It is not accidental that being derived from empiricist psychology, the idea of the collective subject of history, which covers all mankind, was first revealed by Fontenelle. He tries to reconcile Cartesian cosmology with Locke's theory of cognition. Although, as the next century will do, he preserves a conviction about the historical invariability of human nature [23] — this very conviction that all men are basically the same — that an Athenian discussing public affairs in the agora, a "savage" inhabitant of West Indies, a peasant from Vandée and a habitué of Parsian salons have the "same nature" — permits him to discern significant differences only in the varying degree of their culturally accumulated experience. And it is not accidental that differences between particular cultures are characterized by Fontenelle as phases of gradual development which correspond to the process of psychic development of the individual. By this analogy, the early stage of the development of mankind would correspond to the child's mentality because of the dominating mode of experiencing the world, the later stages corresponding to the gradual acquisition of the fundamentals of rational thinking in accordance with the true structure of reality. It was still psychology of cognition, but this time it was cultural and historical psychology. And this psychology imposed the way, typical of the French Enlightenment, of comprehending history, for which the subject was all mankind, after the model of the individual subject of psychic life. The most direct statement was by Condorcet who, in the introduction to his *Esquisse...*, identified the law of development of knowledge with laws of historical progress. Its opening sentences might well have been placed in Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding:* "L'homme naît avec la faculté de recevoir des sensations, d'apercevoir et de distinguer dans celles qu'il reçoit les sensations simples dont elles sont composées, de les retenir" ...[24] etc. A few sentences further down, however, two perspectives are distinguished, in which it is possible to view the process of cumulating experience and forming new states through it. The first exclusively concerns the history of individual cognition and is wholly within what can be called the traditionally understood psychology of cognition. The other, however, is the conscious transcension

[23] B. Fontenelle: *Digression sur Les Anciens et Modernes* in his *Oeuvres*, vol. IV, Paris 1825, p. 238.

[24] A. N. Condorcet: *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Paris 1966, p. 75.

over the limits of the individual mind in favour of the collective subject — the society, in which, through the inheritance of the cultural achievements between generations, the same process occurs in another dimension of time and pace, creating — as Condorcet would say it — the right history: "...si l'on considère ce même développement dans ses résultats, relativement aux individus qui existent dans le même temps sur un espace donné, et si on le suit de générations en générations, il présente alors le tableau des progrès de l'esprit humain. Ce progrès est soumis aux mêmes loi générales qui s'observent dans le développement individuel de nos facultés, puisqu'il est le résultat de ce développement, consideré en même temps dans un grand nombre d'individus réunis en societés." [25]

In that way, with full consistency with the basic assumptions of empiricist psychology of cognition, peculiar disindividualization, socialization, and historicization of the subject were achieved. According to this conception, in the subject there are cumulated and transformed into new structures converting the subject itself, all these contents which are admittedly acquired only in the individual experience but which, mainly through language as an instrument of communication between individuals and generations, constitute the historically changing resource of human knowledge and the degree of perfection achieved by mankind.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE HISTORY-MAKING ROLE OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS AND THE IDEA OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE

In a somewhat different way, a similar idea of the developing subject of history, which achieves more and more perfect states thanks to his own cognitive activity, begins to take shape as early as in the mid 16th century [26] in an area other than the empiricist theory of cognition. In fact, it comes to life partly outside the domain of philosophy itself and only with time will it acquire a philosophical articulation of its content. At its beginnings it is often accompanied by the awareness of clear opposition against philosophy.

In the 16th century many works appeared in print, often written by

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[26] E. Zilsel attributes the role of the turning point in which the idea of historical development of science was born at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. See his *The Genesis of the Concept of Scientific Progress* in "Journal of the History of Ideas", 1945, No. 3, p. 325, whereas A. C. Keller, in *Zilsel. The Artisans and the Idea of Progress in the Renaissance* in "Journal of the History of Ideas", 1950, No. 2, p. 235, places it in the years 1540—1570. See also a chapter on the subject in P. Rossi: *Filozofowie i maszyny — 1400—1700*, Warszawa 1978, p. 78—118.

artisans, like B. Palissy, a French pottery-maker, which were devoted to such technical skills as mechanics (by Besson — 1569, by S. Stevin — 1586, by Guidobaldo del Monte — 1577, by A. Ramelli — 1588), metallurgy (Biringuccio's *Pirotechnia* — 1540, followed by nine editions in three languages), treatises on ballistics and the art of fortification, or on mineralogy and mining such as *De ortu et causis subterraneorum* and *De natura fossilium* (1546) or *De re metallica* (1556), all by Agricola (Georg Bauer). The last book, holds P. Rossi, was to remain for two centuries "the fundamental and unequalled work on mining technology" [27]. Out of the many circumstances going beyond the subject matter of the works of that type, and essential for their more general, philosophical consequences, as for example the clear ennoblement of the craftman's work, at least three contributed to outlining a new, historical conception of the subject and to the discovery of a new perspective of the specificity of man's world. The first was the clear awareness of originality, of creating new solutions, recognizing new properties and structures of reality that were not known before. It is those late-Renaissance technicians and artisans (men most often connected with direct practical activity and in search of solutions of technical problems), who were convinced, to a much greater extent than learned humanists, that they were creating things without any precedents. And the very results of their activity permitted them to take a detached view of the authority of ancient philosophy, as the above mentioned Palissy did: "Through practice I demonstrate that the theories of many philosophers, even most famous and ancient, are false in many points. Everybody can discover that in just two hours if only he takes the trouble to come to my workshop." [28] Especially the improvement of navigation instruments, the invention of print and gunpowder roused the awareness of the superiority of the new technology — and at once of the new age — over the whole past, together with the antiquity idealized by humanists. It is not accidental that while recalling those inventions, Campanella will assert that more historical events took place over the last hundred years than in the four millennia that had elapsed.[29] There is a clear change in the notion of a historically significant fact. In place of events of exclusively dynastic or military character, technical works of human inventiveness step in as historically significant, while the results of the work of various *inventores* come to

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[27] P. Rossi: *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[28] B. Palissy: *Discours admirables, Paris 1580* in *Les oeuvres de B. Palissy publiées d'après les textes originaux avec un notice historique et bibliographique*, Paris 1880. Quoted after P. Rossi: *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[29] T. Campanella: *Civitas solis* — Polish transl., *Miasto słońca*, p. 84.

be seen as historically more important than the deeds of victorious commanders.

Another notable consequence of this technical literature was the revealed awareness of the indispensable co-operation of many people and many generations in solving technical problems. While formulating an original theoretical system it is easier to have an illusion of constructing the new and ultimate edifice of thought all by oneself from the beginning to the end. This illusion was, however, untenable in constructing even the most original products of the art of engineering. It is too much tied to the material co-operation of many people, while the thought objectified in directly material structures does not easily yield to the illusion that it is self-sufficient and independent of the effort, even though mental, of other human individuals. For that reason, despite the previously emphasized awareness of the technological distance between the new epoch and the past, the new literature reveals at the same time a conviction that the individual's own inventiveness is only a part in the work of human achievement. In other words, the individual subject participates in a certain collective work, in an effort of gradually conquering Nature, and subordinating it to human needs. In that way there arises the idea of cognitive and technological co-operation, the results of which, cumulated in history, mark historical progress, whereas creating objects which do not exist in Nature, like a compass, gunpowder or a telescope, shapes the new, peculiar dimension of specially human reality.

These basically philosophical consequences of the development of technical skils are also expressed in the theoretical reflexion accompanying new investigations in particular sciences. Of necessity we shall confine ourselves to one instance only, but we are convinced it is typical. In 1600 there was published a pioneer work on magnetism by W. Gilbert *De magnete magneticisque corporibus et de Magno magnete tellure Physiologia nova.* Having broken off already with the ancient authorities and the plethora of traditional literature in the Introduction, Gilbert is aware that his theory reveals "a new thing, unheard of before" [30]. He admits that he does not adduce any ancient authors because the conception he has presented "is contradictory to most of the principles and axioms of the Greeks" [31]. Instead, he very often cites a book by the contemporaneous sailor and then maker of compasses, R. Norman, "a skilled na-

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[30] W. Gilbert: *On the Loadstone and Magnetic Bodies and the Great Magnet of the Earth* in *Great Books of the World*, ed. R. M. Hutchins, Vol. 28, *Gilbert, Galileo, Harvey*, Chicago—London—Toronto 1952, p. 2.

[31] *Loc. cit.*

vigator and ingenious artificer" [32], who described the declination of the magnetic needle.[33] Gilbert's attitude to the ancient authorities is best illustrated by the last sentences of the Introduction: "To those men of early times (...) first parents of philosophy, to Aristotle, Theophrastus, Ptolemy, Hippocrates, Galen be due honour rendered ever, for from them has knowledge descended to those that have come after them: but our age has discovered and brought to light very many things which they too, were they among the living, would cheerfully adopt." [34] The beginning of the first part of *De magnete* contains a clear exposition of the leading idea of the new conception of cognition, which takes place in history. "In the former times when philosophy, still rude and uncultured, was involved in the murkiness of errors and ignorances, a few of the virtues and properties of things were, it is true, known and understood: (...) mining was undeveloped, mineralogy neglected. But when, by the genius and labours of many workers, certain things needful for man's use and welfare were brought to light and made known to others (...) then did mankind begin to search the forests, the plains, the mountains and precipices, the sees and the depths of waters, and the inmost bowels of earth, and to investigate all things." [35]

We have purposefully paused at this treatise, which is earlier than Bacon's writings but stemming from the same theoretical climate in which the vision of *Instauratio magma* was taking shape, in order to show an area other than philosophy alone, where an idea was born that the development of man's cognitive activity, occurring in the historical process on the principle of co-operation of many people and generations, requires the subject of cognition other than the individual mind. Because this is not the right place to follow the turns of this idea in the history of science [36], we shall confine ourselves to asserting that already in the late 16th century it was fully revealed in the writings of Le Roy and partly in G. Bruno while in the early 17th century, despite the negative estimate of the hitherto achievements of cognition entangled in the accompanying illusions, it can be found mainly in the writings of Bacon and later in G. Hakewill [37] and especially in J. Glanville [38]. Descartes is also convinced

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[33] R. Norman: *The Newe Attractive, containing a short Discourse of the Magnes or Lodestone and amongest other his vertues, of a newe discovered secret and subtil propertie concernyng the declinyng of the needle*, London 1581.

[34] Gilbert: *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[36] See note 26.

[37] G. Hakewill, who came out in his work *An Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God*, London 1627, against the traditional Christian conviction, then voiced by Goodman (*The Fall of Man*, London 1616), that the

that the moment a new method was discovered which would permit, after overcoming scepticism, to restore confidence in experience, it will be possible "to invent practical philosophy" thanks to which, by knowing how natural phenomena work and drawing from" the work of our craftsmen, we could apply them to everything in the same way and become, as it were, masters and possessors of Nature" [39]. Even Pascal, but Pascal the scientist, not Pascal the mystic, paralyzed with the overpowering vision of the infinity of the universe and the magnitude of the Divine Absolute, will present a clear conception of the collective subject developing in the history of cognition, transferring the properties of the individual subject upon the history of mankind: "...not only does each man advance from day to day in the sciences, but all men together make a continual progress ... because the same thing happens in the succession of men as in the different ages of an individual man. So that the whole series of men during the course of so many centuries should be considered as one self-same man, always in existence and continually learning." [40]

This trend of the rise of the idea that the historical development of mankind is organized by the historically accumulating results of the investigative efforts by consecutive generations is directly connected with the history of empiricism understood as a method of the cognitive and practical conquest of material reality. It was not always, however, an empiricism with such philosophical grounding and theoretical consistency as that of Bacon. More often it functioned in the works of the scholars of that time, such as Gilbert or Galileo, simply as a method of concrete

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history of mankind advanced abundant evidence of the superiority of modern science and technology over the ancient knowledge. It is worth noting that the text had several editions in the 17th c., including a Latin translation (Amsterdam 1632), the author of which was, according to Hakewill himself, "one Johannes Jonstonus, a Polonian".

[38] In the *"Plus Ultra or the Progress and Advancement of Science since the Time of Aristotle* (London 1668), devoted to the achievements of the Royal Society, of which he was a member from 1664, J. Glanville presented the distinct idea of the historical progress of cognition. Nevertheless, it did not prevent him, from being an ardent defender of the conviction about the existence of witches and witchcraft. It should be noted, however, that the awareness of the innovations of the sciences of that time, which can be found in his views, was an already widespread conviction in the 17th c. L. Thorndike, in *Newness and Craving for Novelty in the Seventeenth Century Science and Medicine* in "Journal of the History of Ideas", 1951, No. 4, p. 584, cites over a hundred seventeenth-century scientific texts which have the word *nova, novissima* already in their titles.

[39] R. Descartes: *Discours de la méthode* — Polish trans. *Rozprawa o metodzie właściwego kierowania rozumem i poszukiwania prawdy w naukach*, Warszawa 1970, p. 72.

[40] Pascal: *op. cit.*, p. 357.

investigations only. Sometimes it was a seemingly entirely unexpected consequence of a system which was anti-empirical in its starting assumptions (Descartes), or it was an element, even if incoherent in the face of the most general ideas describing and evaluating the human condition, yet suggesting itself unavoidably when the object of cognition was Nature itself (Pascal). However, regardless of those differences, this type of empiricism was connected in the 18th century with the idea, generated by empiricist psychology, of the historical development of the collective subject. Together with this idea it formed the theoretical framework of the Enlightenment conception of historical progress in the shape which was established mainly in the French thought and which underlay the collective work of the Encyclopaedists.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT THEORY OF HISTORICAL SUBJECT

The thought of the French Enlightenment, in that current which can be identified as a theoretical articulation of the bourgeois consciousness in the creative and expansive period of its development and inspired by empiricist traditions in both its variants, delineates a clear conception of historical progress. Subject is man himself, who creates the historically changing shapes of his own world, his own social reality different from Nature because it is governed by its own specific sources of development.

Despite the undoubtedly revealing character of the idea of the history-making activity of man, this conception was entangled in difficulties, which were soon to strangle it. They arose from the one-sided understanding, of human actions constituting historical process, which did not go beyond the limits of historiophilosophical ideals. Hence, in turn, came the lack of adequacy between the adopted theoretical model of historical variability and the historical reality, which could not be described well enough by means of that model. Nor was that model a sufficiently effective instrument of either predicting the future forms of social life or shaping its course according to the ideals of the bourgeois philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Moreover, despite the previously emphasized circumstance that one of the currents of empirical traditions leading to the idea of the collective subject of history was directly connected with the praise of human labour, and despite the fact that it was preserved in the later thought of the Enlightenment [41], the history-making role ascribed to human labour was

[41] This is especially evident already in the assumptions of the French *Encyclopaedia*, which was *Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, devoting much room to entries in the fields of technology and craftsmanship, while

very limited indeed. Furthermore, we can venture a statement that this role only seemingly involved work itself. In reality, these theories emphasized above all the role of technological inventiveness released in the activity of the craftsman and the final cognitive results of practical activity. Certainly, its material effects, which made it possible to conquer Nature more effectively and satisfy human needs, were also generally appreciated. However, they were mainly seen as the achievements of the human mind, which discovers the true structure of reality while solving technical problems and which, through productive activity, produces new objects which make it easier to realize men's projects. Work is therefore recognized as an essential factor of the historical process, but obviously a secondary one. The task of work is the material realization of thought, which thereby constitutes the independent substance of historical process, developing in time. It is therefore not accidental that in the *Introduction to the Encyclopaedia*, which devoted so much attention to craftsmanship and technical skills, d'Alembert indicates that not in material activity and its result out in the psychic content lies the main factor organizing this specific whole, which is the human society: "The mutual imparting of ideas is the foundation and support of this community" [42].

Ultimately, therefore, the reduction of man's history-making activity to merely a cognitive activity and the discovery in it of only the primary factor that shapes the historical process, leads clearly to the identification of the laws of historical development with the laws of developing cognition. The history of human thinking becomes thereby the fabric which theoretically permits to reconstruct the course of all the history of human society. Even when Condorcet begins his picture of the development of mankind with the earliest epochs, which he characterizes for the ways of making a living (pastoral activity, the birth of agriculture), it finally

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only seventy years earlier *Dictionnaire français* by A. C. Richelet described the entry *mécanique* like this: "the term... denotes the opposite of the liberated and the honorable, it means wretched, vulgar and unworthy of an honest man" (after Rossi: *op. cit.*, p. 22). On the other hand, in his *Essai sur les moeurs et de l'esprit de nations* and in the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire characterizes social life with vast recourse to crafts, trade, the art of warfare, etc., being incidentally the first to do so (see Meinecke: *op. cit.*, p. 63).

[42] J. D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* — Polish trans. *Wstęp do Encyklopedii*, Warszawa 1964, p. 12. Also Turgot says that "it is owing to the imparting of ideas... that the human race is seen by the philosopher as one large developing whole". See A. R. Turgot: *Tableau philosophique des progrès successif de l'esprit humain* in *Oeuvres*, vol. II, Paris 1844, p. 598. The identification of the principles of historical continuity with the imparting of ideas led in turn to the attribution of a special role to language as the fundamental form of the objectification of developing cognition. This has been indicated by F. E. Manuel: *The Prophets of Paris*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962, pp. 29—33.

turns out that proper development first occurs in the modes of human thinking. For it "had first to dawn on men that animals could be reared" [43], while progress was then either the result "of new combinations of thought" or it resulted from "observation and reflexion which suggest themselves to all men" [44]. However, Condorcet's exposition of the further course of historical process, in accordance with the title of his work, leaves no doubt that the "progress of the human spirit throughout history", that is the development of cognition in history, is for him the only proper substance of historical process. It is worth noting here that it is not with Hegel that a conviction starts that history is the history of developing consciousness, objectified in various social and political structures.

The conviction that it was the thought that was the real subject of history very often led to a peculiar desubjectivization of men in their actual social conditions, especially the desubjectivization of the working classes in whom no significant history-making powers were discerned. Even J. J. Rousseau, close to the plebeian thought, while considering the possibility of realizing a democratic and republican system through the social contract: will nevertheless write "How would a blind multitude, which often knows not what it wishes because it rarely knows what is good for it, execute of itself an enterprise so great..." [45]. This blind multitude must be first enlightened from the outside. Someone must show them the "right way" which they are unable to find themselves because the "people must be taught to know what they require" [46]. For this purpose, Rousseau contends, an exceptional individual is necessary as the right and causative historical subject and the source of historical changes. Such an individual as has attained full cognition and who is capable of rising above the present history and, having freed himself from its constraints, recognizes from the outside, as it were, the inconvenience of the current state of affairs and its causes. In order therefore to enlighten this "blind multitude" and to make them aware of their own will, which will be able to become the content of the social contract and the foundation of a new social order, we require, says Rousseau, "a superior intelligence (...) who could see all passions of men without experiencing any of them; who would have no affinity with our nature and yet know it thoroughly; whose happiness would not depend on us, and who would nevertheless be quite willing to interest himself in ours..." [47].

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[43] A. N. Condorcet: *op. cit.*, p. 89.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[45] J. J. Rousseau: *The Social Contract*, New York—London 1974, p. 61.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[47] *Loc. cit.*

The reduction of man's history making activity to exploratory thinking and of the laws of historical development to the rules of the development of cognition and its consequences result in the epistemological categories of the Enlightenment philosophy being transformed into historio-philosophical categories. For the history of cognition provided more than the foundations for the temporal structuring of historical process, which permitted to distinguish in it the specificity of particular epochs with respect to the dominating type of thinking or to the attained achievements of human knowledge. The remaining key concepts of the theoretical description of historical reality are also derived from epistemological categories. In particular, this refers to the notion of truth. In this interpretation the history of mankind is seen as, on the one hand, the history of gradual approximation to truth, and, on the other, as the spread of its social acceptance. No wonder that the Enlightenment will attribute such a special role to education and learning, seeing in them the fundamental form of creating the new historical world. According to Helvetius "...excellent education will be able infinitely to multiply virtues and talents in great states" [48], while every change in the system of education must result in the change of the political system of a state.[49] Condorcet will in turn contend that "Les progrès des sciences assurent les progrès de l'art d'instruire, qui aux-mêmes accélèrent ensuite ceux des sciences, et cette influence réciproque... doit être placée au nombre des causes les plus actives, les plus puissantes du perfectionnement de l'espèce humaine." [50]

But the overestimation of the history-making role of education and instruction was not the only consequence of the concept of truth being transformed into a historio-philosophical category. Following the conviction that approaching the truth is a process of the gradual cumulation of achievements contributed to the historical cognitive activity by particular individuals or generations, the resulting picture was one of a basically monolinear structure of historical development. The metaphysical conception of truth as a state which, though deepened through the increase of human knowledge, yet at least potentially, has a permanent and absolute logical value, did not make it possible to discern that in the process of development some factors have a positive role only temporarily, exclusively in relation to its definite stage; that the same steps which human mind climbs on the way to truth, and which, at a certain moment, constitute the indispensable conditions of progress

[48] C. A. Helvetius: *De l'esprit* — Polish trans. *O umyśle*, Warszawa 1957, vol. II, p. 154.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

[50] A. N. Condorcet: *op. cit.*, p. 277.

must with time be overcome and rejected because they limit its further perspectives and have only an inhibiting role. Such a conception of truth and of the process of approaching it did not permit to discover the historical relativity of epistemological categories transformed in the instruments of historical description, and to reveal that not only continuity and cumulation, but also disharmony and discontinuity, internal conflict and breach of ties with established structures, are the necessary conditions of historical development.

The thought of the Enlightenment had, nevertheless, its principle antinomous towards values recognized as constitutive to historical progress. This principle permitted to explain that progress occurred unevenly and why, despite the assumed idea of accumulation of human achievements, which determine both the specificity of man's world and its gradual development, there are also periods of historical regress and the loss of values already attained. It was necessary to find such a principle, the more so that the whole of Middle Ages was seen in the consciousness of the Enlightenment as a period of decline, which broke the continuity of historical process. But this principle in the form then discovered was of an exclusively negative character. It functioned as the total negation of all values regardless of the historical moment it was applied to. In the historical process itself it functioned only as the permanent object of its annihilation. According to the philosophical premises of the Enlightenment theory of man's history-making activity this principle was also a category derived basically from epistemology as it was the negative counterpart of such notions as cognition and truth, that is ignorance, falsehood, and cognitive error.

In that way, however, and in spite of retaining the essential idea that the creative subject of history is the human mind, the achievements of which are progressively accumulated in history, there appears a new element in the philosophical current under analysis. The very concept of the cumulation of information that produces new values and new forms of social life is no longer sufficient for the historical process, although the latter is still understood as the development of cognition and its consequences. In history a factor appears that eludes the control of reason alone, the more so that in the Age of Enlightenment there is a deeply-rooted awareness that false cognition and ignorance can be specifically institutionalized as advantageous for the dominating social groups interested in remaining in power. The discernment of the danger of the political use and cultural preservation of errors, which are potentially inherent in human cognition and which are thereby transformed into prejudice distorting both cognition and its social consequences, is therefore a forerunner, but only a forunner, of the fact that the narrowly

epistemological conception of history will be overcome by means of revealing the social entanglements of cognition itself. The moment the false knowledge becomes transformed into the tradition-honoured conviction based not upon reason but — as Condorcet puts it gently — solely upon the authority of certain classes [51], then, indeed, a new, peculiar type of reality arises, but this reality, although linked with particular social interests, will ultimately remain a spiritual reality, erroneous cognition, which only reason is capable of annihilating. Therefore, there was after all the underlying conviction that the essential source of the deformation of social life, which prevented it from agreeing with ideals formed in the consciousness of the Enlightenment, was at any rate the deformation of cognition itself and, consequently, while the basic aims connected with overcoming social evil admittedly require the struggle for the realization of new values, the object of the struggle must be the mystified forms of human thinking.

This peculiar substantialization of error into prejudice, the transformation of cognitive deviation into reality hostile to true cognition, gives the Enlightenment idea of history-making activity a trait of clear dualism. Reason and prejudice are seen in it as two forces engaged in their apocalyptic struggle. This conflict in history between reason and prejudice, with the latter produced by the former as an error, yet rebelling against it, must unintentionally impose an easy analogy of God fighting against Satan in the name of victory of light and good over the kingdom of falsehood and darkness. This analogy was very often emphasized by the then bourgeois historiography of philosophy.[52] It appears, however, that it would be an oversimplification to see in it, as is commonly done, merely the testimony in secular form of the vitality of the traditional themes of Christian theology and the relics of Manichaean-Augustinian dualism; some kind of secularized theomachia, where Reason and Prejudice are substitutes for the ideas of Divine Creator and Fallen Angel. An interpretation like that is not permitted above all by the too deep-rootedness of this presumably secular soteriology of the Enlightenment, both in the epistemological premises, from which the theory of historical development then arose, and in social experience, which imposed specific drama upon this theory. But to question wholly the significant character of this analogy would also be to emasculate a certain essential cognitive perspective, because this analogy has deeper extra-theoretical and extra--theological premises. We can presume that the element of dualism in

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[52] The danger of theoretical abuses resulting from this theory has been pointed out by Z. Kuderowicz: *Filozofia dziejów, (Philosophy of History)*, Warszawa 1973, p. 46.

the two juxtaposed cases revealed, though in a different way, the same intuition, though only intuition at that time, formed by the true social reality, that man's activities in social life make up an unstable system, internally antagonized, and therefore the history of man's world can be presented only as the history of a dramatic struggle between hostile powers. These still appear in the two conceptions as exclusively spiritual powers, but with regard to the thought of the Enlightenment we can at any rate say that they are now so much demystified that they are no longer of extra- or superhuman character. What appears in them is not some will alien to man, to which he is subordinated, but his own, though still spiritual, dispositions: they are creative and for his own good in the case of the developing principles of rational thinking, or threatening all accepted values when they are errors and deviations of human cognition, transformed into prejudice. But even they were at any rate recognized as coming from man himself, thus ultimately subordinated to his will and doomed to annihilation. In that way, even in what used to be the social reality resistant to human actions and hostile to human needs, the Enlightenment found the results of the action of man himself. Thanks to that there emerged quite a new perspective of man's share in the realization of the future forms of social life. It started to be treated as a possible object of conscious formation in accordance with the requirements of "natural reason", that is, as was believed, of the universal reason, which expressed causes common to all mankind. But at this very point the Enlightenment idea of the thus understood subject of history, especially of future history, in which the social ideal was hoped to be realized through reason freed from the yoke of prejudice, was to suffer the bitterest defeat. The subsequent historical development has demonstrated that the realization of such achievements as the progress of cognition and its practical application in industries, the realization of the principle of personal freedom and formal equality before the law, with the simultaneous retention of private property, indeed contributes to the formation of a new social structure, but it proved to be just as far from being perfect and not less internally antagonized than the previous strutcures. The thought of the Enlightenment, which found the proper substance of historical process in itself, was not at all abstract human thought "in general" [53] which revealed the general and necessary

[53] hat such feeling accompanied the thought of the Enlightenment has been convincingly shown by K. Mannheim. "An die Stelle der mittelalterlich-christlichen objektiven Welteinheit tritt die verabsolutierte Subjekteinheit der Aufklärung: das Bewusstsein überhaupt; Das Subjekt, der Träger der Bewussteinheit war auf die Stufe der Aufklärung eine ganz abstrakte, überzeitliche, übersoziale Einheit — das Bewusstsein überhaupt". *Op. cit.*, p. 61—62.

principles of rationality. However, it, elevated only one special kind of thinking to the standing of the universal requirements of reason: that kind where the particular aims and values of a new class were expressed, those of the bourgeoisie, who began to perceive their historical chance in destroying the world created by forces hostile to that class and in constructing in its place the world for their own needs. It is this destructive power of the new thought against the traditional values and authorities, and at the same time the creative power of rational thinking and cold calculation in the service of man's initiative that may have been the source of the double illusion, the illusion that first, historically defined reasons are universal and necessary, and, second, that attaining the principles of rational thinking and then making use of them is the basic form of creating the historically changing social reality, specific exclusively for man.

The dissipation of the two illusions was already the work of the 19th century, when a different, richer, and more complex idea of the historical subject was to be formulated. The first illusion was questioned by Hegel. While retaining the conviction still derived from the Enlightenment that all development was the development of thinking and at the cost of its at least partial objectification in the superhuman absolute subject, Hegel revealed much deeper dialectical mechanisms, transcending the limits of the consciousness of particular individuals, of how the historical process takes place. The annihilation of the other illusion was connected with a certain idea voiced still in the Enlightenment [54], but this idea was fully taken up by Marx and enriched with the consequences of Hegel's dialectic. This allowed the sources of historical process to be found not in thinking alone but in the material activity of man, in human labour.

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł poświęcony jest uzasadnieniu tezy, że idea postępu dziejowego w tej jej postaci, jaka ukształtowała się w myśli mieszczańskiej XVIII zwłaszcza stulecia polegała na wyprowadzeniu konsekwencji wynikających ze stopniowego odkrywania w ludzkości zbiorowego podmiotu poznania. W ten sposób oświeceniowe teorie roz-

[54] Already the opening sentence of A. Smith's fundamental work, as many as twenty years prior to the *Esquisse* by Condorcet, announces theoretical reorientation and the radical breach with the treatment of life and social development in epistemological terms: "The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour". Adam Smith: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. M. Hutchinson, London—Chicago—Toronto 1952, p. 7.

woju historycznego miały w gruncie rzeczy charakter epistemologiczny, ponieważ dzieje ludzkości stanowiły dla nich jedynie historię rozwijającego się procesu poznania oraz jego społecznych, moralnych i politycznych rezultatów.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Данная статья посвящена обоснованию тезиса, что идея исторического прогресса, сформировавшаяся в мещанской мысли XVIII века, возникла на основе выводов, вытекающих из постепенного открытия в человечестве коллективного субъекта познания. Поэтому теории исторического развития эпохи просвещения носили эпистомологический характер, ибо история человечества была для них только историей развивающегося процесса познания, а также его общественных, моральных и политических результатов.