

Edmund Burke: A Conservative Revolt Against Enlightenment Rationalism

Edmund Burke: Aydınlanma Akılcılığına Muhafazakâr Bir Başkaldırı

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Abstract: The most distinctive feature of enlightenment thought that tries to build a new person and design of the universe is that it brings overconfidence in reason to the fore. It has been thought that the laws on social order and natural reality can be understood in the lead of the reason, thus many problems encountered by humanity will be solved. However, this optimistic thought could not come true as expected, enlightenment has brought many problems and uncertainty. The unfavourable situation arising in connection with the values that the enlightenment thought put forward has become the focus of criticism for many thinkers. One of the thinkers who criticise the conversions the enlightenment created along the lines of conservative thought is Edmund Burke. Burke, opposes the abstract reason thought and cares for the values that humankind put forward in the historical process of humanity. Burke's aim is not to deny the reason, but to show that reason works in the cultural context and axis of values. In this study, Burke's criticism against enlightenment rationalism and thoughts on the changes observed in the social area accordingly will be examined.

Keywords: Edmund Burke, conservatism, enlightenment, rationalism, French revolution.



Introduction

Generally, the concept of the Enlightenment refers to the philosophical, social, and political transformations that occurred in the 18th-century¹ European thought. The ideas expressed within the framework of the Enlightenment, while not universally inclusive of all societies to the same extent, contain dimensions that were influential in many countries and continue to be subjects of discussion and debate today. Based on these discussions, various interpretations of the Enlightenment emerge, and the content of the concept is filled in different ways. If we set aside the different perspectives on definition of the Enlightenment and its development, it becomes clear that the unifying and central concept of the Enlightenment is “Reason”. According to Cassirer, the 18th century is characterized by reason (Cassirer, 1955, p. 5). Reason is considered the absolute point of truth, the sole criterion, and the unique guide for human behaviour. Kant’s answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” also points to this central position of reason. What is expected from humans is the courage to use their own reason. In this context, the phrase “Sapere aude!” meaning “Dare to use your own reason” becomes the motto of the Enlightenment (Kant, 1984, p. 213). Any thought that is incompatible with reason is viewed as dogmatic and is rejected. In this case, everything must either justify its existence before the tribunal of reason or cease to exist (Buhr et al., 2006, p. 80).

The concept of reason is not first recognized and understood through Enlightenment thought; its importance and superior position have been emphasized by many philosophers from ancient Greece through to the Enlightenment era. However, with the advent of the Enlightenment, reason began to acquire new positions and meanings. Within the framework of Enlightenment thought, reason is considered a universal concept, not

¹There is no complete consensus on the beginning of the Enlightenment. As Fehmi Baykan points out, even Peter Gay, considered an authority on the Enlightenment, has not provided a consistent determination of its start. In his book *The Enlightenment: A Comprehensive Anthology*, Gay refers to Francis Bacon as a precursor to the Enlightenment on page 46, while on page 20, he states that the Enlightenment began in 1689. However, Francis Bacon was born in 1561 and died in 1626. See. (Baykan, 2000, p. 32).



merely a historically and socially determined one. It is regarded as a universal essence applicable to all thinking subjects, nations, eras, and cultures. In other words, reason is not an ability possessed by only a selected group, but rather an ability that encompasses all people, enabling them to achieve general and common goals. As a principle, it is an ability that all humans can use. Therefore, reason is viewed not as an inheritance but as an acquisition. It is an original mental power that guides the determination and discovery of truth (Cassirer, 1955, p. 6, 13). Reason possesses a liberating nature and encompasses all elements considered beneficial for humanity. To attain the good, every scientific, philosophical, and social project should be grounded in reason and the principles it embodies. Consequently, myths, prejudices, superstitions, and the religions that produce and institutionalize them, which are believed to be enslaving, should be regarded as values of the old order and set aside. Indeed, reason is believed to have the power to uncover the laws governing social order and natural reality without needing anything beyond itself. Through this power, it is thought that the nature of human relationships can be understood, many of humanity's problems can be solved, and a well-functioning social order can be achieved (Çiğdem, 1997, pp. 13-14, 37).

However, this optimistic perspective did not fully materialize, and the Enlightenment brought with it many problems and uncertainties. The critical approach developed in line with Enlightenment rationalism created a void in the realm of values and deeply shook the foundations of social structure. The excessive trust in reason, and the accompanying negative consequences, have been focal points of criticism for many thinkers. In fact, criticisms of the Enlightenment's concept of reason have come from thinkers within this intellectual tradition. One notable figure in this context is J. J. Rousseau. Rousseau criticizes the Enlightenment's elevation of reason, arguing that by glorifying reason and disregarding emotions, humans become estranged from their true nature (Durhan, 2023). Early criticisms of Enlightenment rationalism, while acknowledging that the Enlightenment was an ongoing process that had not yet been completed, were attempted to be addressed by thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn and Immanuel Kant (Cevizci, 2002, p. 2; Vural, 2017, p. 25). However, these criticisms have continued in various dimensions up to the present day.



Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an Irish-born British philosopher and politician, is renowned for his early critique of the Enlightenment thought and continues to be widely discussed today. Burke criticized the transformations brought about by the Enlightenment thought, particularly the view expressed by the French Enlightenment thinkers that humanity and society would progress through universal reason and reach a perfect stage. This study examined Burke's critiques of the Enlightenment rationalism and his thoughts on the changes observed in social area. Burke was chosen as the subject of study because his criticisms of Enlightenment thought quickly gained influence in relevant circles, and the debates he sparked have continued to this day.

Tradition Against Abstract Reason

Burke's thoughts on the Enlightenment are shaped in opposition to Enlightenment rationalism, particularly as observed in France, and to the French Revolution, which he viewed as a political consequence of this rationalism. Burke's key work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, first published in 1790, offers a critique of Enlightenment rationalism and the French Revolution. The work is considered one of the first and most substantial challenges to the Enlightenment rationalism and the French Revolution. The event that prompted Burke to write this work was a sermon delivered by the prominent clergyman Richard Price on November 4, 1789, in which he expressed support for the French Revolution. Burke expresses that he was deeply disturbed upon hearing Price's words and emphasizes that the sermon had a political, rather than a religious, content. He states: "For my part, I looked on that sermon as a public declaration of a man much connected with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians, and theological politicians, both at home and abroad..." (Burke, 1955, p. 9).

Reflections, published as a counter-thesis to Price's thoughts, quickly resonated within the intellectual circles, and Burke faced severe criticism both in his home country and abroad due to his stance in the work. Intellectuals of the time, such as Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine, depicted Burke as a "fraud," "hypocrite," "reactionary," and "opportunist." Later, Karl Marx reversed the terminology Burke used against the French revolutionaries, using derogatory terms to describe him,



calling him a “famous sophist and sycophant” (Özcan, 2022, pp. 11–14). However, Burke’s predictions about the Revolution largely came true and thus over time diminished the impact of such criticisms. Indeed, Burke emphasizes that many people were executed during and after the revolution, arguing that the revolutionaries’ promises of liberty, equality, and fraternity were not fulfilled.

Burke’s ideas are open to criticism; however, it is important to note that he was not absolutely against the Enlightenment and revolution. On the contrary, he was a thinker who was part of this tradition and spoke through the arguments of this tradition. Indeed, Burke is aligned with the Scottish Enlightenment tradition. His critique targets the French Enlightenment, which manifested itself as the “Enlightenment of Reason,” along with the social and political developments that followed. The Scottish Enlightenment tradition is often characterized as more moderate, empirical, less secular, and less revolutionary compared to the French Enlightenment. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers emphasized elements such as emotion, experience, tradition, and habit in their analyses of individuals and society, rather than solely focusing on the power and competence of reason. In this context, the Scottish Enlightenment is interpreted not as a ‘Enlightenment of Reason’ but as an enlightenment of virtue, common sense, and sympathy, in contrast to the French Enlightenment. Therefore, when evaluating Burke’s views on the Enlightenment, it is important to consider that his thoughts do not represent a complete break from Enlightenment but rather position him as the grave digger of the French Enlightenment, not the Scottish Enlightenment (F. Duman, 2010a, p. 74; Şenses, 2018, p. 41).

French Enlightenment philosophers, particularly the Encyclopaedists, regard reason as an objective historical force and endeavoured to build everything upon it. They believe that humanity and society would advance through reason and ultimately achieve a state of perfection. In this process, anything that cannot legitimize itself through reason, and anyone who does not regard reason as their guide, is consigned to the dustbin of history. In this context, French Enlightenment philosophers, despite differences in their specific ideas, strive to establish reason as the guiding principle for both the mind and society, expanding the empire of reason daily to



rationalize the world. In this foundational framework, they argued that the legacy of the past was insignificant for social reform and reconstruction, dismissing the values produced by tradition and history for the proper functioning of reason. In other words, they treated reason as a “zero point” and attempted to build society upon it (Şenses, 2018, pp. 47, 143). Burke, on the other hand, emphasized that societal progress should be grounded in a society’s history, traditions, and experiences. He viewed attempts to establish a new social order based solely on abstract reason, disregarding the legacy of the past as an illusion.

Burke viewed traditions, which are the products of centuries of experience, as the foundation upon which reason operates. Reason always functions within a cultural structure formed by a specific social context. Human reason never exists in a vacuum. However, enlightenment thinkers, without considering the structure of reason, viewed traditional elements as obstacles to the proper functioning of reason and the attainment of truth. They dismissed these deeply ingrained elements of human hearts as strange, absurd, and outdated, casting them aside (Burke, 1955, p. 74) because for them, traditional elements have an irrational nature and pose an obstacle to reason. Without removing these barriers, true understanding could not be grasped and lasting solutions to humanity’s problems could not be proposed. Therefore, for the humanity to advance and develop, society must free itself from these traditional elements.

Burke argues that social life is based not only on the rational activities of individuals but also on emotions, habits, emotional attachments, compromises, and traditions-elements that reason cannot fully comprehend and without which society would collapse (Parkin, 2006, p. 159). According to Burke, history and tradition, which encompass humanity’s accumulated experiences, possess intrinsic value and wisdom. He argued that individuals should not hastily dismiss the past but should act as temporary stewards of the values they inherit, ensuring their transmission to future generations. Individuals do not have the right to use the heritage left to them as they wish. Instead, they have an obligation to leave a liveable place for future generations, without damaging the original fabric of society (Burke, 1955, pp. 91, 92). Indeed, in Burke’s thought, the state, as the highest form of society or political organization, should not be viewed as a simple



partnership established for temporary interests, easily dissolved at the discretion of individuals, or have its laws altered at any time. “It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born” (Burke, 1955, p. 93).

Burke attempts to demonstrate the necessity of referring to the past without excluding the principle of ‘progress’ emphasized by Enlightenment thinkers. In his view, starting from the past always tends to strengthen continuity. Neglecting the past disrupts a nation’s bonds and continuity. In this case, without learning from our ancestors, individuals are born and die like seasonal summer insects (Burke, 1955, p. 92). At this point, Burke’s goal is to enable individuals to benefit from the general capital accumulated by nations and eras. Indeed, this accumulation from the past serves as a guiding compass for humanity. If we are deprived of this accumulation, we will have no compass to govern us. In that case, we even don’t know what port we are steering to (Burke, 1955, p. 75). In this context, Burke emphasizes that we should approach the past institutions and values inherited from it with humility and respect. Respect for the past enables us to confidently look to the future and establish a well-functioning social order. The past forms a society’s collective memory, and upon this foundation, a future is built. The future is a continuation of the past, and a future cannot be built by breaking away from the past. Those who do not look to the past and consider their ancestors and the legacy they left behind cannot think of future generations either (Burke, 1955, p. 31).

Burke contrasts the traditional elements he emphasizes with reason, attempting to support this view through references to human nature. Human nature encompasses not only reason but also passions, emotions, and instincts. These aspects of human nature are embodied in traditions, prejudices², attitudes, and behavioural codes formed over the course of

²In Burke’s philosophy, ‘prejudice’ does not mean a preconceived notion or stereotype. Prejudice is prior knowledge formed by adhering to tradition, representing historical awareness and inherited wisdom, and serving as the “summary of authority and knowledge”, which guides reason to help find the right path (Nisbet,



history. In other words, the empirical results of the functioning of human nature are manifested in specific social rules, behaviours, values, and attitudes. Ultimately, the existing social principles and rules are seen as the natural embodiment of the functioning of human nature (F. Duman, 2010a, p. 108).

Burke emphasizes that the influence of reason on the emergence of passions and emotions is not as significant as it is often considered (Burke, 2008, p. 48). According to him, passions and emotions, which are independent of the functioning of reason, are irrational driving forces that God placed in our natural structure. Even if we cannot comprehend the reasons why God has placed these emotions and passions in our nature, we must trust in Him and hold firmly to what He has given us. These emotions and passions, rooted in human nature and to which Burke attributes a kind of naturalness and intrinsic truth, shape our thoughts, actions, attitudes, and ultimately, our entire lives. The foundation of social order, relationships, and rules lies not only in reason, but in these non-rational 'social passions' (F. Duman, 2010b, p. 102). However, the fact that the social passions that emerge in the traditional structure do not rest on a rational foundation does not mean that they are irrational. They are, in fact, products of a kind of collective wisdom accumulated over time by many generations.

Burke's emphasis on traditional elements is rooted in his belief that humans possess a flawed nature and limited reason. Due to these limitations, humans can never fully achieve perfection. Enlightenment thinkers, with their excessive confidence in reason, developed the idea that humans could achieve perfection by forgetting their limitations. When the concept of perfectibility combined with the principle of progress, it was believed that humans could achieve anything, and they could perfect themselves and their environment without the need for anything beyond reason. This perspective leads to the crossing of boundaries of humility and causes humans to view themselves in the position of God. In a sense, the relationship between God and humans is reversed; God's existence becomes dependent

2011, p. 59). This knowledge is not produced through individual experience but through collective experience over time (Frohnen, 1993, p. 38). Prejudice, possesses an impulse to trigger reason and a compassion to maintain continuity (Burke, 1955, p. 84).



on humans. Burke emphasizes that when humans forget their place in the hierarchy of existence, their arrogant attitude toward their own position becomes the source of many problems in various areas. Indeed, the Enlightenment's emphasis on human-centeredness and the advocacy for the 'rational autonomous subject' have been accepted as fundamental theses, with everything being built upon this understanding. However, there exists a complex and mysterious chain of causes that connects everything in the universe to the great first cause, that is, God (F. Duman, 2010a, pp. 100–101). However, the perfect chain of causes that link all things, even to the throne of God, cannot be unravelled by human endeavours. If we go just one step beyond the directly perceivable qualities of things, we exceed the limits of our understanding. After that, all we can do is make a powerless struggle that shows we are in a place that does not belong to us (Burke, 2008, pp. 133, 134). As can be understood from these statements, humans can only acquire knowledge of the perceivable qualities of things. In other words, humans can know the 'How' of things, but they cannot know the 'Why' (Strauss, 2011, p. 351). Burke's views on the source and limits of knowledge, while different in detail, are methodologically anti-rationalist, akin to the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. His broader examination of human nature is grounded in the empiricist traditions of Locke and Newton. In this context, Burke, like the Scottish thinkers, attempts to explain the structure and functioning of the human mind, behaviour, and judgments through Lockean empiricism. While outlining the limits of human knowledge, Burke does not aim to diminish humanity in the face of reality that surpasses reason, but rather to show that humans should adopt a humble perspective that acknowledges these limitations. In the face of a mysterious reality that can never be fully understood, humans have no choice but to adopt a humble stance (F. Duman, 2010a, p. 102). In Burke's thought, this is the fundamental argument which Enlightenment thinkers, who elevate reason to the status of God, could neither accept nor oppose.

Burkean Conservatism, Social Change, and Revolution

Burke's critiques of Enlightenment rationalism and the French Revolution, which he viewed as a destructive and oppressive form of absolute power, led to his recognition as the founder of modern political and social



conservatism³. Burke advocates for preserving traditional elements in opposition to the new, emphasizing the importance of maintaining established practices. However, his approach to preserving the old does not involve attempting to establish a system of fixed and unchanging principles. In his perspective, benefiting from the past means adapting traditional elements to the present context, thereby revitalizing them within contemporary society (Kirk, 2005, p. 140). Conservatism, shaped by this meaning, first emerges as a reaction against those who seek to destroy and rebuild an entire system using pure reason (Özipek, 2011, p. 49). Burkean conservatism, which consciously expresses this reaction, centres on tradition rather than the abstract reason seen in Enlightenment thought and emphasizes society over the abstract individual. Burke's understanding of society, in contrast to the broader conception within the Enlightenment, includes the traditions, behavioural codes, and values that humans have developed over centuries.

Burke prioritizes society over the individual, but he does not advocate for preserving society in its current form. His conservatism is shaped within a framework that does not propose radical changes to the existing social order but seeks to strengthen and develop the connections between the past, present, and future without severing those ties. Burke opposed the idea of radically transforming the institutions that have developed throughout human history or creating a new order without considering the existence of these institutions as such revolutionary ideas aim to sever the bonds that hold society together and lead to destructive consequences. According to Burke, when common sentiments are weakened and the noble institutions of life are damaged, we return to a state of nature, where all moral duties are suspended, leading to an environment of violence (Hampsher-Monk, 2004, p. 344). According to Burke's assessment, this is

³When conservatism is analyzed beyond conceptual analysis by considering certain criteria, different types of conservatism can be distinguished. In order to make this diversity of conservative thought meaningful, Andrew Vincent categorizes conservatism as traditionalist, romantic, paternalist, liberal and new right. In this classification, the conservatism shaped by Burke's ideas is considered as "traditionalist conservatism." However, this classification is not absolute. The problem is a question of emphasis and types of conservatism always overlap with each other (Vincent, 2006, p. 98).



what happened with the French Revolution. Although the revolutionaries aimed to achieve principles such as liberty, equality, and fraternity, their actions resulted in destruction, anarchy, and terror, deviating significantly from these ideals.

Although Burke is an anti-revolutionary figure and strongly upholds historical continuity, he does not oppose change. He advocates for gradual change that does not undermine the social structure, in contrast to radical transformations. According to Burke, society is a growing, complex organism. This complex structure could not be swiftly improved through revolutionary changes. Burke argued that there are no simple or definitive solutions that grant the right to bring something newer and better than what we currently have. Social development requires time. Society is not a mechanism that can be altered overnight by adjusting its settings or operations (Skirbekk & Gilje, 2006, p. 334; Tannenbaum & Schultz, 2007, p. 346). There may be structures within the social system that need to be changed or adapted to the passage of time. However, these should be addressed through small, superficial reforms that do not touch the essence of the traditional system. The reforms should be carried out without focusing on individual interests, ensuring they are well-considered and that the principle of justice is maintained. Reforms should be made quickly for the benefit of the state, but gradually for the benefit of the people. This is because gradual reforms can be permanent and allow for growth (Ebenstein, 1996, p. 217). In this context, Burke portrays the image of a well-intentioned, patriotic, and wise statesman who opens the door to progress: "A man full of warm, speculative benevolence may wish his society otherwise constituted than he finds it; but a good patriot, and a true politician, always considers how he shall make the most of the existing materials of his country. A disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman. Everything else is vulgar in the conception, perilous in the execution" (Burke, 1955, p. 153).

Burke believes that, in a sense, change is necessary in order to preserve. While seeking change, his goal is to achieve something better. He expresses his thoughts on change with the following words: We are not opposed to change; however, even when we change, our aim is to preserve. In everything we do, we follow the examples set by our ancestors. We carry



out the restoration of a building as faithfully as possible to its original form. Prudence, attention to preservation, and moral caution have been the guiding principles of our ancestors' most determined actions. If we wish to deserve our ancestors' wealth or carry on their legacy, let us imitate their practices. If necessary, let us add, but let us also preserve what they have passed on to us (Burke, 1955, pp. 243–244). Burke, (1955, p. 29) argues that all changes and improvements should align with the intrinsic wisdom of nature and be guided by a principle of reverence for ancient times and states the following: "... By preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain, we are never wholly obsolete. By adhering in this manner and on those principles to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy" (Burke, 1955, p. 32).

As can be understood from the above statements, Burke views change as essential for a state to preserve itself. He emphasizes that without mechanisms for change, a state would lack the means for self-preservation (Burke, 1955, pp. 19–20). He believes that institutions that have lost their function within society need to be reformed. Useful parts of an institution should be preserved, and the new parts should be integrated with them (Burke, 2022, p. 211). This approach facilitates progress. However, while change is necessary and desirable for progress, it should not occur too frequently. In societies characterized by constant change, no principle can become a tradition. Moreover, Burke argues that teachers responsible for children's education cannot adequately prepare them for life in such societies. Children, thought to be ready for life and integrated into society, will encounter a different way of life due to rapid changes. Burke believes that if changes are as numerous and frequent as the desires and dreams in people's minds, societal structures will deteriorate, and over time, individuality will be scattered like dust and debris, ultimately swept away by the wind (Burke, 1955, p. 92). By placing preservation, not change, at the centre of reason, Burke attempts to show that change can be sustained in practice based on society's history and traditions (Akkaş, 2000, p. 7).

Burke's perspective on change is reflected in his endorsement of the 1688 English Revolution, which he approached from a conservative standpoint. He believed that not all political changes were inherently misguided.



An extraordinary and sudden action may be necessary to overcome an extraordinary and severe malady (Burke, 1955, p. 23). What matters, however, is that the social values established over centuries are not disrupted during the process of change. According to Burke, the English Revolution, unlike the French Revolution, did not seek to disrupt or destroy the established order of social, moral, and spiritual bonds. The political actions taken during the English Revolution represent the happy effect of following nature, which arises from deep thinking or spontaneous wisdom (Burke, 1955, p. 31). In the English Revolution, rather than dismantling existing institutions, new practices that society needed were implemented. The Revolution aimed to preserve the old laws, liberties, and constitution as the sole protector (Beneton, 2011, p. 19; Burke, 2022, p. 53). Therefore, the English Revolution did not involve a break from the traditional structures or an understanding of an entirely new organization. This revolution is grounded in the belief that the traditional structure should be reconstructed according to the needs of society. As a result of this revolution, which sought to preserve the historical rights of the people, a state of peaceful tranquillity was achieved, and society preserved the same classes, the same orders, the same privileges, the same rights, the same property rules, and the same obedience (Ebenstein, 1996, p. 218). In fact, according to Burke, the English Revolution legitimized itself by restoring the rights that had once belonged to the people but who were stripped of their rights by the arbitrary actions of those in power (Nisbet, 1997, p. 118).

On the other hand, the French Revolution sought not to preserve the existing structure but to dismantle it and establish a new society based on abstract reason. According to Burke, the fundamental flaw lay in the way society was reconstructed. The French revolutionaries' greatest mistake was their attempt to replace the traditional rules governing human will and actions with new, rational constructs. What Burke opposed was the revolutionary spirit of innovation itself. In Burke's view, the revolutionary spirit of innovation is generally the product of selfish nature and narrow perspectives (Burke, 2016, p. 60). The Revolution, which emerged as a "rebellion of innovation," destroyed and eradicated the fundamental elements of society (Turner, 2016, p. 61). Although those who carried out the French Revolution, inspired by the spirit of innovation, seemingly acted under the



slogans of equality, liberty, and fraternity, in reality, they sought to seize political power and establish a social order that would serve their own rule.

Burke acknowledges the influence of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution, but he does not interpret the Revolution solely as a “bourgeois revolution” that dismantled the feudal system. Similarly, although the revolution involved the participation of the people, he does not view it merely as a “popular revolution.” Burke describes the French Revolution as a “philosophical revolution” led by philosophical fanatics (Burke, 2022, p. 170). In this context, the revolution was driven by “theoretical dogmas” and “philosophical speculations.” The French Revolution is the product of “philosophical fanatics”⁴ who, through their pursuit of a “doctrinal empire,” not only destroyed authority but also eradicated all the authority upon which they relied, leaving no stone unturned in society through their impartial reasoning. The goal of the philosophical fanatics who rely on doctrines is to eliminate the two unifying elements of European civilization: nobility and religion. Philosophical fanatics and their revolutionary followers, with a Jacobin attitude, sought to destroy the world of meaning created by nobility and religion on both material and spiritual levels. Through a form of social engineering, they attempted to cultivate new citizens by constructing consciousness aligned with their understanding (F. Duman, 2010a, p. 278; Şenses, 2018, p. 138; Strauss, 2011, p. 341). As can be understood, Burke does not evaluate the French Revolution only as a political revolution. Burke thinks that the French Revolution is also a rebellion against human feelings and passion as well. With the revolution, in the name of universal abstract reason, the common feelings inherent in human nature were aimed to be destroyed.

Burke, believing in the philosophy of Enlightenment rationalism, views the social engineering project initiated by those who carried out the French Revolution with the spirit of innovation not as a constructive endeavour, but rather as a social destruction, contrary to what is commonly believed. Indeed, the revolutionaries attempted to rebuild all societal institutions from scratch, disregarding the past and aligning them with their

⁴Burke uses terms such as philosophical fanatics, political writers, politician-theologians, and theologian-politicians to describe the philosophers and Jacobins in France, as well as liberals like Paine and Price in England (Nisbet, 2011, p. 119).



own understanding of rights (Kochin, 2013, p. 649). Burke addresses the revolutionaries, who, by disregarding the wisdom of the past and starting from the fictional zero point as follows: "... You acted as if you had everything to start anew. You began with illness, for you started by despising everything that belonged to you. You began your endeavours poorly... By respecting your ancestors, you would have learned to self-respect. ..." (Burke, 2022, p. 59).

Burke summarizes the outcome of a revolution carried out through unnatural methods and in opposition to nature with the following words: "Laws overturned; tribunals subverted; industry without vigour; commerce expiring; the revenue unpaid, yet the people impoverished; a church pillaged, and a state not relieved; civil and military anarchy made the constitution of the kingdom; everything human and divine sacrificed to the idol of public credit, and national bankruptcy the consequence..." (Burke, 1955, pp. 36-37). Therefore, in Burke's view, there is no similarity between the pre-revolutionary promises and the post-revolutionary reality.

Burke believed that France would require a long time to recover and to return to its previous state (Burke, 2022, p. 170). Indeed, the Revolution caused far more destruction than it appeared. With the revolution, not only ancient institutions were overturned, but also ancient principles were destroyed (Burke, 2016, p. 116). According to Burke, the necessary course of action at this point is to preserve the society's organic structure, religious beliefs, traditional values, and ancient institutions, and any artificial interventions should not be allowed on them, as has been done up to now. Indeed, history has demonstrated that those who engage in upheavals have never prospered, and similarly, assaults on established societal order or society's beliefs and values have never led to success (M. Z. Duman, 2022, p. 746). Although this Burke's perspective, for the revolutionaries, the outcome is seen as a success. Indeed, through the revolution, the true face of the oppressive system that exploited the people under various pretexts was exposed, and human rights and freedoms gained importance.

Conclusion

Edmund Burke, whose thoughts were shaped by the Scottish Enlightenment tradition, opposes the Enlightenment tradition that advocates discarding values such as traditions, customs, and beliefs inherited from



the past in the name of reason in other words, what he opposes is the intellectual tradition that elevates reason above tradition and considers the individual outside of a historical context, placing them above society. This tradition centres on the abstract human stripped of the identity bestowed by history and society, along with their abstract reason. Burke, in contrast to abstract reason, defends practical reason, along with the tradition, historical consciousness, accumulated knowledge, and prejudice that arise from it. His goal is not to deny reason, but to demonstrate that reason operates within the axis of values and in a cultural context. Individuals think and act according to the values they have created. Burke's aim was not to confine individuals to traditional values but to demonstrate the significance of these values within traditional structures for both individuals and societies. Societal elements, with their structures that transcend the individual, offer much to humanity, and that people should benefit from the accumulated wisdom of the past rather than ignore it. Acting based on abstract reason, disconnected from cultural structures, undermines social and political order, leading to destructive consequences. In Burke's view, this has been the case: the abstract reason central to the Enlightenment has inspired radical transformation projects, ultimately leading to revolutions such as the French Revolution, which resulted in chaos and suffering for humanity. As can be understood from the statements, Burke draw a direct connection between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In Burke's view, it is the principles established by the Enlightenment that made the French Revolution possible. Therefore, it is clear that there is a theoretical coherence between Burke's philosophical perspective, developed in opposition to Enlightenment thought, and his social and political analyses of the Revolution.

Burke's opposition to revolutionary changes does not mean that he defends the established societal order. Burke believes that change should emerge naturally as a result of the historical process, not through radical transformations, such as revolutions. Indeed, revolutionary changes could lead to the destruction of society's identity, along with the cultural heritage and collective memory embedded in it. Traditions, as products of historical experience, are too valuable to be discarded in favour of the transformation projects conceived by abstract reason. Therefore, the accumulated wisdom



of centuries and humanity's achievements cannot be discarded in the name of change. Each society possesses unique values, and any transformation should align with these values to maintain social harmony. In summary, Burke critiques those who prioritize abstract reason over historically shaped values as well as the social and political projects derived from such reason, and those who advocate for transforming society based on these projects. Indeed, revolutionary changes, driven solely for the pursuit of innovation have not yielded favourable outcomes for individuals and societies, nor have they contributed to genuine progress. Although this is Burke's perspective, societal and political transformation projects based on reason should always be supported for the goodness of humanity.

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Öz: Yeni bir insan ve evren tasarımı inşa etmeye çalışan Aydınlanma düşüncesinin en belirgin özelliği, akla duyulan aşırı güveni ön plana çıkarmasıdır. Aklın önderliğinde toplumsal düzen ve doğal gerçekliğe ilişkin yasaların anlaşılacağı, bu sayede insanlığın yaşadığı birçok sorunun çözülebileceği düşünülmüştür. Ancak bu iyimser düşünce istenilen düzeyde gerçekleşmemiş, Aydınlanma birçok sorunu ve belirsizliği de beraberinde getirmiştir. Aydınlanma düşüncesinin ortaya koyduğu değerlere bağlı olarak ortaya çıkan olumsuz tablo, birçok düşünürün eleştiri odağı olmuştur. Aydınlanma düşüncesinin yarattığı dönüşümlere muhafazakâr düşünce ekseninde eleştiri getiren düşünürlerden birisi de Edmund Burke'dür. Burke, Aydınlanmanın soyut akıl anlayışına karşı çıkar ve insanlığın tarihsel süreç içerisinde ürettiği değerleri önemser. Burke'ün amacı, akli inkâr etmek değil, aklın, değerler ekseninde, kültürel bağlamda işlediğini göstermektir. Bu çalışmada, Burke'ün Aydınlanma akılcılığına yönelik eleştirileri ve buna bağlı olarak toplumsal alanda gözlenen değişimlere ilişkin düşünceleri incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edmund Burke, muhafazakârlık, aydınlanma, akılcılık, Fransız devrimi.

