The Features of the Method and Style of Voltaire's Philosophising

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This article reveals the specificity of Voltaire's philosophical reflections, stemming from the educational tendency that determines the peculiarity of the plot moves and the mental operations of his philosophising. The author explicates the state of mind of the time in which Voltaire's thought crystallised, and that contributed to the formation of a new form of discursiveness. The analysis enabled the shaping of an understanding of the reasons why satire and irony have become the key method in such a discourse. The author addresses the rhetorical techniques and Voltaire's sophistic technique, and gives their classification. In particular, Voltaire's method of simplifying reality, philosophical monologism, projection and imaginary experience are analysed. The elements of style are examined in which the method of polemical misunderstanding and deliberate stupidity plays an important role. Voltaire's philosophical ideas, derived from and defined by this context, are revealed. The author thus provides an insight into the deep connections of Voltaire's method and style of philosophising with the core of his metaphysical position and socio-political doctrine.

Key words: *Voltaire, Enlightenment, method, satire, debate, monologism.*

Introduction

Francois-Marie Arouet, known by his pseudonym Voltaire, is considered one of the founders of the French Enlightenment. He exerted a strong influence on all the French enlighteners, with the possible exception of Montesquieu, who himself had a great impact on Voltaire. The specificity of Voltaire's philosophising, the original style of his treatises and the methodically deliberate pathos of the presentation manner were not only a continuation and justification of the mental experience inherited by tradition, but also a rather bold establishment of a new

form of philosophical thought. The uniqueness of this kind of philosophising was dictated primarily by the situation of the mind shaped by that time, which largely influenced and determined the originality of the means and methods, new thinking moves and operations that compose the fabric of the newly formed discursive field.

The eighteenth century is characterised by the fact that the political and economic reality receives its ideological formulation and a pronounced educational trend, where the 'scientism of educational philosophy is inextricably intertwined with the construction of social utopia' (Ogurtsov, 1993). In this era, the magic of power still remains in place and the cult of Reason and its absolute power become an obvious confirmation thereof: 'The essence of the Enlightenment is an alternative, the inevitability of which coincides with the inevitability of domination' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997). Intellectual power attracts; it is believed that for the good of other people, one needs to have a certain power. However, the concept of a sovereign-philosopher, an enlightened monarch, is a utopian dream, since power always functions according to different internal laws other than free thought. The possession of power means the loss of the freedom of thought, as it depends on many empirical life circumstances. Power has a strong influence on intellectuals, so every thinker seeks to gain the support of a monarch or aristocrat, and as a rule succeeds (Gorlova et al., 2019). All monarchs consider themselves enlightened, and the idea of an enlightened monarch turned into such a palatial clownish farce represents an opposite of its own ideal.

The French Enlightenment had its own specifics. It did not so much enlighten as ridicule. But, to a large extent, to make fun of something means to enlighten. Classical philosophy and the French Enlightenment unfold the idea of antiquity in relation to the existence of two worlds. One world, an ordinary one open to all, is opinion; the other world, a hidden, inner one, is truth. Science and philosophy introduce us to the world of truth, to a deep inner order. This is not the world as it is in immediate presence, but rather an inner, hidden meaning of the world. It is argued that there is some order, a plan of the universe, according to which everything happens naturally, and according to which events in the external world are carried out in an orderly manner. It is assumed that the world is arranged in some rational, orderly and meaningful way. This meaning (intention) is manifested in history itself.

Given the presence of an inner meaning, history unfolds, moving from an unenlightened state to an enlightened one, from an unjust and violent state to a fair and free outcome, where freedom, equality and fraternity will reign. If natural disasters occur, then this is an accidental obstacle to historical progress. It was in the Age of Enlightenment that the French substantiated the idea of historical progress. These random events of all kinds impede the triumphal procession of the spirit. According to Hegel, the whole course of history moves from a lesser freedom to a greater freedom. This is the route of the world spirit, which realises itself through successive stages of history. Through the French Enlightenment

philosophers – Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach – the idea of the inner plan of the universe emerges: that history is meant for some successful outcome, which is good for humankind. This idea exists in our worldviews as a sedimentary one, in various kinds of propaganda literature. However, in the classical heritage, this kind of representation has an integral significance because it refers to the entirety of philosophy.

In its consciousness, in its ideological framework, the French Revolution of 1789 is a product of the philosophy of the Enlightenment; the belief favoured by the enlighteners that the philosopher, the ideologist, the politician knows the secret meaning of the universe, and thus the interests of the masses.

During the period from 1789 until the accession of Napoleon Bonaparte, there was a lot of debate in the National Assembly. The National Assembly received a treatise by Jeremiah Bentham, *Panopticon* (general inspection, outlook), which was an opinion or a guide for states on how to manage the people for their purposes. This name describes the entire Enlightenment era. 'General supervision' or 'observing everything' allows us to systematically change the environment of circumstances around everyone to everyone, proceeding from the fact that the impact of the environment on a person is crucial. We can get predetermined and desired results from the person if we organise and change the environment. On the one hand, the world has meaning and order that must be extended to the surrounding human external environment; on the other, the intellectuals are the pillars of knowledge. This kind of thinking energy opens up new prospects of philosophising, requested by the mind status as a form-shaping force.

Philosophy is the language of theoretical thinking. Philosophical terms and concepts are therefore difficult to correlate with the words of ordinary language. The greatest difficulty that we encounter in philosophy is the establishment of a connection between philosophical concepts and their situational meaning – that is, with the content of the social and spiritual situation in which these concepts arise. These concepts contain the situational meaning that gave rise to them. Here we must bear in mind that philosophy, as a kind of theoretical language, has its own immanent laws of development.

So what is at the bottom of this kind of orientation, and what causes it? First, it is the ability and determination to accomplish certain actions, to act in one way or the other, take a certain position, react to any circumstances and interpret them in a particular way. Even when it comes to the mind of a specific person, it is always an inherited mind, already shaped by tradition, by cultural background. M.K. Mamardashvili writes about it as follows: 'There are patterns of thinking bequeathed to or inherited by us according to tradition – that is, we think not because we have come to this free thinking, but because we have inherited it from tradition' (Mamardashvili, 2012). Our raw mind is always an expression of what is

established in the form of the generally accepted, formal and conventional. In our thoughts, in knowledge about ourselves and about the world, there is already some kind of inherited way of thinking. That is, our minds are derived from the generally accepted form of the rational. Even if we rebel or are dissatisfied with something, even if we criticise something, our actions are simply derived from certain circumstances, from the given literature, which we have come to believe in deeply.

It is precisely because of the presence of reason, which is shaped by tradition, that we can talk about a certain situation of mind. This is not about the fact that I, an individual, encounter certain circumstances, but rather about the fact that I am shaped in a certain way, and it is not myself with my aspirations, feelings, emotions and impulses, but the pattern of my mind, which is faced with ordinary situations. The point is that in all individual circumstances, I have a mind shaped by a certain tradition – not me particularly as an empirical person, but a certain mind of mine finds itself in a certain situation. Evidently, we are talking here about the situation of mind in which the traditionally shaped rationality finds itself. This is a situation in which a person in the world of natural phenomena, social events, moral actions, can and is able to establish some kind of order, commensurate with their internal organisation, with their spiritual structure, with the orderliness of their morality and judgement. Our mind does not depend on us personally (although the circumstances shape us). We still cannot say about ourselves, 'I wanted and thought in a certain way.' The point is that something is being thought in us, due to the fact that our thinking has an established way of functioning. It is important to find out how, with this shaped mind, we can navigate the constantly changing empirical circumstances that result from our historical conditions.

The situation of mind is characterised by the fact that, possessing the internal order of the soul, and by the definition of human existence as such, everyone seeks the co-measurability of the sought-after order in a society with the internal organisation of their souls. That is, the order of the world must somehow correspond to the inner organisation of our souls, the organisation of our ability to imagine, our faculty of abstract thinking. As V.V. Bibikhin (1993) explains, 'A person, if it may be put in such a way, is capable of the world, comprehends it, of course, not in the epistemological sense of knowing its organisation, but in the sense of being in it (Heidegger).' Antiquity correlated the internal order of the human soul with the cosmos and the polis, which are much larger and wider than the personal level of authority. Everyone must relate the inner order of their soul with the soul of the cosmos, the soul of the polis, the soul of the world. In this connection, Montesquieu speaks of the spirit of the law. He correlates he internal order of the soul with the spirit of the law, the universe. Voltaire speaks about the spirit of history.

The aim of this study is to analyse the method and style of Voltaire's philosophy, to determine the reasons for their formation and their role in his philosophy.

Theoretical Basis

M.-J. Condorcet, as the first biographer of Voltaire, gave the first interpretation of his philosophy, embodied through the ideas of the Age of Reason and Progress, having made his figure one of the symbols of the enlightened idealism (Williams, 1985). However, this idealisation limited Voltaire's multifaceted and deep philosophy in terms of both content and style. The search for the 'real' Voltaire, as R. Rockwood rightly notes in his 1937 essay, took more than a century after his death in 1778, and can be said with certainty to continue today. Voltaire's versatility can be traced through his pseudonyms, the change of which is in itself a reflection of those guises that his philosophy accepted (Wilewski, 2011). In addition, as one of the brightest representatives of the philosophical novel, Voltaire stands at the intersection of philosophy and art in his intellectual development, influencing and being influenced not only by philosophies, but also by the aesthetic trends of his time (Wade, 1969). The literary forms themselves were important in the context of understanding the philosophy of the eighteenth century (Dieckmann, 1971). Voltaire's aesthetics and aesthetic pragmatism allowed his criticism to rise to the highest of heights (Vrooman, 1972). Here his literary work reflects the highest traditions of classical poetry of antiquity and French literature (Nablow, 1997, 2004; Campbell, 2009).

Analysis of Voltaire's worldview and philosophical ideas is already complex from a purely historiographic perspective, due to the enormous amount of the philosopher's written heritage (and work about the philosopher), and the multiplicity of interpretations accumulated over more than three centuries (Aldridge, 1978); Voltaire literally scattered his views on fundamental questions of philosophy in 'thousands of letters [about] hundreds of topics' (Ages, 1981). As a rule, researchers focus on the most famous and important works of Voltaire – *Candide* and his *Philosophical Letters* (Pearson, 1993). It is also well known that Voltaire, a representative of the continental branch of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, is closely connected with the English tradition, due to his fascination with the philosophy of Newton and Locke, close contact with Bolingbroke (1927), and acquaintance with the philosophical essays of G. Thacker (1967) and the philosophy of English deism in general (Tate, 1969).

Voltaire's method and style of philosophising are closely related to the problem of the Enlightenment and its existing academic concepts, the nature and limits of which are themselves the subject of academic debate (Burson, 2013). The specificity of Voltaire's interests repeatedly allowed subsequent researchers to question the fact that his work belonged to philosophy (Henry, 1977). The centre of his interests undoubtedly lay in the field of problems of theodicy, morality and the philosophy of history and society. Interestingly, in political philosophy, Voltaire can be viewed as both the initiator of the 'uprising against rationalism', showing a certain scepticism towards the ideas of irrepressible progress and

fundamental changes (Rasmussen, 2011), and as an advocate of radical social changes (ter Borg, 1988). Voltaire based his philosophical conclusions on a broad analysis of historical material (Richter, 2002; Sakmann, 1971; Topazio, 1959), including those related to historical everyday life (Pierse, 2009). All this creates perspective for the analysis of Voltaire's socio-political philosophy within the framework of modern concepts of social relations – for example, in Gottlieb (2005).

Discussion

Philosophy is trying to determine which world is acceptable and habitable for humankind. There are worlds in which it is impossible for a person to live in a meaningful way. Of course, to understand this one must be a thinker, to strive for a meaningful way of life. For Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau and others, French society turned out to be an uninhabited world in which one cannot simply live automatically without having done some work on redefining it, moulding the world into forms of life and comprehension that are accessible for a person. For such molding, certain tools are indispensable, and the philosophy of the Enlightenment proved to be one such tool. It became an instrument for the new arrangement of the world so the world could be worthy of human existence.

In other words, there was an inherited philosophy of Francis Bacon, John Locke, Rene Descartes and Baruch Spinoza – the traditional philosophy of rationalism and sentimentalism. With this philosophy, the French enlighteners could not achieve proportionality. Between the inner mental organisation, which is determined by traditional philosophy and the world around humanity, there was no proportionality. Therefore, the enlighteners created a new type of thinking, in which satire and irony played an important role. Hegel (1994) writes about this in the following way: 'French philosophy is more lively, agile, wittier, or rather, it is with itself. It is an absolute concept that turns against the whole realm of existing rigid notions and fixed thoughts, destroys everything that is immobile, and informs itself the consciousness of pure freedom.'

In their philosophising, Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism are transformed through satire and irony. This is clearly traced by Voltaire in the 6th letter of *Philosophical Letters* from England:

> If you come to the London Stock Exchange, a place more respectable than many royal courts, you will see a crowd of representatives of all nations gathered there for the benefit of the people: Jews, Mohammedans and Christians communicate here with each other as if they belonged to the same religion, and called 'infidels' only those who declare themselves bankrupt; here a Presbyterian confides in an Anabaptist and an Anglican takes a Quaker's word by trust. Leaving these free,

peaceful assemblies, some go to the synagogue, others – to have a drink …
(Voltaire, 1988)

Why does Voltaire show such a picture? He does so in order to emphasise that the business-minded, free and unconstrained life of individuals, which is driven by selfishness, is useful for the whole society. It unites people, and religions are ridiculous because they divide people, because there are many of them and each claims to be the only true one. According to Voltaire, the evil arises in the absence of toleration, since the latter gives rise to religious wars. As Ernst Cassirer (2004) notes:

> Toleration, tolerance, which religious fanatics dare to call a dangerous misconception and monstrous demand, is defined by Voltaire as the true basic property and purpose of the mind (*l'apanage de la raison*). Toleration does not mean a separate act of philosophy, but rather expresses the very principle of philosophy.

Voltaire uses a rhetorical device, which consists of opposing religion and business life. That is, monetary profiteering is above religious worship. Religion is placed on the same plane as a business. This new laying of the world in such an order makes the world accessible to our comprehension. Well in advance of Voltaire's time, religion is shown in such a light that it seems ridiculous from the very beginning. It uses a sophistic technique – something in which Voltaire was an unsurpassed master.

What is the sophistic technique of Voltaire? From the whole, he snatches a separate part, which , is being projected in a powerful light. The foregoing can no longer be challenged. To rename the world, which is unreasonable, Voltaire uses the technique of a quick change of thoughts, images, words. Pace is an integral part of the Voltaire's whole philosophy. The method of a quick change of events involves simplifying reality; it is a method of simplifying all problems. This simplification is achieved with the help of antitheses and oppositions of religion and stock exchange, tolerance and intolerance. Let's say religion is stupid because it separates people, and by way of contrast the work is useful because it unites and serves the common good.

In his deep philosophical work *Candide, or Optimism*, Voltaire argues with Leibniz and ridicules his ideas about the pre-established harmony and about the fact that our world is the best possible world. Voltaire simplifies and turns into a joke Leibniz's metaphysical idea of the pre-established harmony. He writes:

> We argued continuously and received twenty strikes of a belt a day until the clutch of events in this universe brought you to our galley, and now you bought us

out. 'Well, well, my dear Panglos,' Candide said to him, 'when you were hanged, slaughtered, beaten mercilessly, when you were rowing on galleys, did you continue to believe that everything in the world was for the best?' 'I have always been faithful to my former conviction,' answered Panglos – After all, I'm a philosopher, and it is not for me to repudiate my views; Leibniz could not have been mistaken, and the pre-established harmony is the most beautiful idea in the world, as well as the fullness of the universe and weightless matter.' (Voltaire, 1908).

Furthermore

Panglos would tell Candide: 'All events are inextricably linked in the best possible worlds. If you hadn't been expelled from the beautiful castle with a healthy kick in the back because of Kunigunda's love, if you hadn't been taken by the Inquisition, if you hadn't walked all over America, if you hadn't pierced the baron with a sword, if you hadn't lost all your sheep from the glorious country of Eldorado – you would not now be having neither lemon peel in sugar nor pistachios.' (Voltaire, 1908)

The simplification of problems is evident. It always happens in the history of culture, the history of philosophy. For instance, having inherited a certain complex apparatus of problem analysis – Lockean, Cartesian or the like – we acquire a powerful technique. But this technique turns out to be completely unsuitable for analysing the changed social circumstances, and it is rejected with the help of irony. The rejection of this technique is attributed to the use of the reality simplification method. This method is universal in times of all historical crises.

The imaginary reality of experience is built. Imaginary experience is created for polemical purposes. The reality is falsified by simplifying the causes of events. Voltaire sees the reason determining human fates as either a natural phenomenon, or an accident, or a villain. But the top position among them belongs to stupidity (this should be borne in mind). Voltaire is not interested in the historical conditions in which social institutions and traditional beliefs have taken shape over a long chain of events. He proves that every person can have any fate. It is only necessary that this fate does not come into opposition with the law of nature. In fact, only one conviction remains: the conviction of the internal ordering of natural phenomena and events, but not in the circumstances surrounding us. Like any moralist, Voltaire simplifies. Common practical, educational intelligence, which turns out to be the only measure for evaluating all things and events, comes to the fore. What is this simplification method for? In order to free society from all those religious, political, economic relations that have become unreasonable. They have become incommensurable with a clear mind, having turned into a Gordian knot, which can be

unravelled only by chopping. This is the method used by the French enlighteners to unravel all the contradictions of their epoch. The method of the French enlighteners is an attempt at a new situation of the mind to give a person new tools that would allow them to comprehend an unreasonable world. What is it for? To live a meaningful life. Because the life sense is the goal of the utmost importance for the person.

Despite the moralising tone, Voltaire deliberately simplifies, reducing the role of humans in the world, asserting the force of circumstances that determine their being (Fitch, 1935). Purporting that the circumstances make the person. In this regard, it is important to note the seventeenth century – the age of classicism, the Cartesian era. This epoch was characterised by tragic images expressed in the tragedies of Corneille and Racine (the tragic type of personality). In the eighteenth century, the tragic idealisation fell out of fashion. This century is not inclined to the sublime, it aspires to everything pleasant, elegant, witty. Salon culture is flourishing in France.

The ideology of the Enlightenment is an important stage in the development of classical rationalism and empiricism. It is here that the necessity of transcendental (otherworldly) thinking is allowed – such thinking, in order to be carried out in thought or action, unfolds to the whole world. In this sense, transcendental thinking is nothing but a form of expression of absolute consciousness, a consciousness in which all the connections and facts of the world are reflected. This consciousness is the basis of the act – here and now. The appeal to the transcendental world and transcendental thinking does not have to be immediate. Voltaire and Montesquieu need not have talked about transcendental thinking, because this appeal is being replaced by the laws of nature and history, universal norms and rules of life. In other words, absolute consciousness, presented in the form of some universal laws, norms of life, as if for myself and instead of myself, contains all the acts of development. Absolute consciousness is infinite. This is an infinite intellect that is capable of capturing all the connections of the universe. On the other hand, it is clear (and Kant insists on this) that our thinking is finite.

Yet those laws, rules, norms to which we appeal suggest some absolute being, absolute consciousness, which sheds light on our own act; this gives the ground to our thought and our actions. In the context of absolute consciousness, the educational ideology is unfolding (Bersot, 1848). It fixes a hypothetical procedure thanks to which thinkers actually unfold themselves in absolute consciousness. Thus intellectuals are agents in the providence of history, since they know the hidden plan of the universe; they are the attorneys of the transcendental world.

At the basis of classical philosophy, deeply rational and optimistic, believing in the power of reason, lies the assumption that the agent in providence can see very far and understand everything. Why is this happening? Because the enlightener unfolds their thought in the

channel of some absolute consciousness. From this consciousness, and not from the thinker, a favourable sense of humanity comes about. That is, a person with their goal, with their historical and moral actions, is in some kind of primordial womb. This womb envelops them with benevolent meaning – hence the assertion that nature and history have an inner meaning. We are informed about this meaning by an ideologist, a philosopher.

The transcendental world contains absolute truth, absolute and universal values and meaning, which presuppose the existence of absolute consciousness, since they can be justified only in the realm of infinite consciousness. In the era of the Enlightenment, in the field of philosophy and creative art, the image characteristic of the Renaissance disappears. This is an image of a contradictory becoming and never-ending reality, since such an image cannot be brought under the framework of the enlightening mind.

As early as the seventeenth century, the importance of such features as theoretical abstraction, typification and empirical generalisation sharply increased. These features acquired a leading position in the picture of the universe of the eighteenth century. The model of the world was rebuilt in such a way that the single remained next to the general, as an instance of the general. That is, the single was preserved as an instance of the general to the best of its typicality, generalisability and averaging. On the other hand, the single acquired the value of something of an indisputable, irrefutable fact, provided that this fact could fit into the sphere of the known laws. On the one hand, a single fact was documented or experimentally established; on the other, it was general and typical.

The fact as the single, the general and the typical plays a major role in the worldview of the eighteenth century. It can be traced especially vividly in art. The educators, with their unhistorical nature, with their abstract and rational utopianism, with their mechanistic understanding of matter, with their desire for abstract generalisation and typification on the one hand, and factuality on the other, were least able to appreciate the cultural tradition. By way of example, in 1732 Voltaire's *The Temple of Taste* was published. It depicts the library of God, in which almost all the books are corrected and abridged not by the hand of humans, but by the hand of the Muses – reflecting absolute taste, absolute consciousness.

The idea of transcendental consciousness turns into a unity of one consciousness. This is the preparation for Fichte's absolute 'I'. It does not matter at all that this consciousness takes a metaphysical form; it can be called consciousness in general or pure consciousness, or normative consciousness (as in Montesquieu), transcendental consciousness (as in Kant) and so on. Next to this universal and inevitably one consciousness is the multitude of empirical consciousnesses that, from the viewpoint of universal consciousness, are random or entirely superfluous.

In some interpretations of Kant, Fichte and Hegel, such a question is posed: How does the absolute idea, Hegel's absolute spirit or Fichte's absolute 'I' relate to individual human consciousness? The question itself is posed in the wrong way. Such a problem does not exist for the thinkers. From the point of view of universal consciousness, each individual consciousness is accidental and therefore irrelevant. Either it should cover you completely or you cannot connect to it.

Everything that is true and essential is within the sphere of universal consciousness, and all that is individual, distinguishing one person from another, belongs to the psychophysical organisation, to the limitations of the human individual. From a gnostic point of view, individual consciousness is simply irrelevant. Everything that is true fits in the limits of one universal consciousness and this consciousness leads to some systemically monologic context. Ideally, one consciousness suffices for the entire fullness of cognition, so there is no need for a multitude of empirical consciousnesses. Dialogism was inherent in the Renaissance consciousness, and this dialogism is eliminated by the monologue form of the world and truth perception.

That said, Renaissance dialogism is replaced by monologism in the eighteenth century. On the basis of such philosophical monologism, creativity is thought and perceived as an expression of one consciousness, one universal spirit (Bakhtin, 2000). Even where it is a question of the diversity of the creative forces, unity is emphasised by the image of one universal consciousness. For instance, Voltaire spoke about the spirit of history (later Hegel would speak about the world spirit), Montesquieu spoke about the spirit of laws, Rousseau spoke about the spirit of the natural state. Everything meaningful, everything sensible, is gathered in one consciousness, complying with a single accent. Anything that does not fit this denominator is considered irrelevant and accidental. European rationalism, with its cult of the universal mind (but especially in the Enlightenment), contributes to the penetration of the monological principle into all spheres of ideological and spiritual life. This principle holds all of European utopianism, including utopian socialism, with its belief in the omnipotence of conviction, in the omnipotence of some single point of knowledge. In other words, the belief in the self-sufficiency of one and unified consciousness is the deepest structural feature of the entire classical philosophy, the whole ideological creativity of the New Age. That is, the artist, writer, ideologist, politician, and philosopher is ultimately the most knowledgeable, understanding and seeing.

In terms of creative art, the idea as a depiction principle merges with the form. The idea defines all the formal accents, all the ideological values of the work of art. Ideology as a conclusion, as a semantic result of what is depicted, inevitably turns the world around us into an unequivocal '0' of this conclusion. That is, an image can be either a simple illustration of an idea, a simple material of ideological generalisation, or just an example of an idea. Where

the image is entirely focused on the ideological conclusion, we face either an ideological philosophical novel or a tendentious work (such as Voltaire's *Candide*). The unity of the point of view organises in the central idea both the elements of style and abstract philosophical conclusions. Thus the entire organised and unorganised masses of ideology are subordinated to one accent and are meant to express a single point of view. Therefore, the whole world turns out to be a '0' point of view; the whole world does not exist by itself, not in its internal structure, but is expanded as a '0' of a single point of view, as an accountable material for this point of view.

Hence the characteristic attitude to other people's ideas. Someone else's idea is either interpreted in one's own way, or is polemically denied, or ridiculed as stupidity, and thus ceases to be an idea at all. For the purpose of eliminating other people's ideas or simplifying them, the enlighteners use a very important literary device – a moment of misunderstanding (social events, various kinds of lofty ideas). The moment of misunderstanding is the style-forming factor in the Voltaire's *Candide*. What is the essence of this moment? The moment of misunderstanding in the work of art is intentional, and in the philosophical work, along with the moment of intention, there is a moment of critique.

A moment of misunderstanding and deliberate stupidity is used for debate. At the heart of this deliberate stupidity lies a polemically acute misunderstanding of the pathetic lie that has enmeshed the world and imposes a certain meaning on the world. Polemical misunderstanding is an important means to expose hardened liars in the conditions of the Enlightenment (political, religious, legal, scholarly-pedantical).

Voltaire believed that there were natural laws with which everyone must reckon and to which they must agree, and these laws could be discovered using the method of Newton and Locke. You can use the method of Descartes, but in limited quantities. Voltaire believed that the method of Descartes, introduced into philosophy and science, had a more fundamental significance than the results obtained by him. In the *Letters from England*, Voltaire writes that the society established there is completely free from prejudice; there is a free exchange of opinions. This allows Voltaire (1988), with due irony, to note that, 'I again want to emphasise that I am free to present all this to you, but I do not give any guarantees for any of the opinions expressed here; I am not responsible for anything.' The *Letters* was called a scandalous book, hostile to religion and morality, and was forbidden. Such were the roots of Voltaire's interest in the culture and societies of China (Gottlieb, 2005; Rowbotham, 1932) and India (Mohan, 2005).

It was Voltaire who was the most passionate proponent of the ideas of Newton and Locke on the continent, which he understood purely empirically. Newton himself, as the intellectual leader of the nation, had a hypnotic impression on Voltaire (Johnson, 1994). The Newtonian

theory and the Newtonian method formed the metaphysical concept of Voltaire, including the notions of dependent, random matter created and endowed with the necessary properties by Being (God) (Alexander, 1944). He believed that Newton's method was a universal, methodological basis for solving all the problems of cognition. The essence of the method for Voltaire was that it was necessary to study not the essence of things – as is the case with Descartes – but their behavior. Therefore, the fact must go before any principle. But in fact, both with Descartes and Newton, everything happens the other way around: within certain principles, laws and ideas, the facts become clear and get their rationale. On the basis of certain principles or laws, certain experimental research is carried out. Since Voltaire empirically interprets Newton's method, his interest in Locke's empirical psychology becomes clear. Voltaire considered Locke to be the most genuine philosopher, the only one who revealed the real history of the human soul and its structure.

The ideas of Newton and Locke, which spread in France primarily thanks to Voltaire, radically changed the direction of French thinking. These ideas are easily perceived because they are empirically interpreted. After Voltaire, the French turned to practical problems, and began to talk about politics broadly (Desnoiresterres, 1871–76). It is important to bear in mind that Descartes' rationalism dominated Voltaire in France. The empirical tradition of English philosophy followed it. The philosophy of the Enlightenment laid the spiritual foundation for the revolutionary transformation of society. The desire to transform the society marked the entire program of encyclopaedists. The famous *Encyclopedia of Sciences, Crafts and Art* was directed not only to communicating knowledge, to summarising the achievements of science and technology, but, according to Diderot, to changing the way of thinking.

From Paris, salon culture spread throughout Europe, particularly Russia. In England, philosophy interested only the few, and in France all the educated people took a great interest in it, so philosophy gradually became an explosive intellectual force.

Voltaire created a revolution in the minds of his contemporaries (Torrey, 1938). He did not want to overthrow religion as such. Like all French enlighteners, he professed deism. God was needed as the root cause of the world. Deism, however, sees the deity not as a trinity, but as a mind. In this sense, it holds about the supremacy of the mind, about the cult of the mind. B. Pascal called deism the religion of philosophers and scientists, Karl Marx described it as an overlaid form of materialism. Voltaire (1988) wrote in the *Philosophical Dictionary*: 'It is in the interests of all mankind that there is a god who would punish that which is unable to suppress human justice.'

First, Voltaire spoke out against the Catholic Church, against the authority of the clergy. The slogan 'Crush the reptile' belongs to him. 'To whatever extent he strongly attacks positive tenets,' says V. Windelband (2000), 'so strongly, on the other hand, is he convinced of the

need for a religion of reason'. Voltaire was not an atheist, although the classical philosophy was characterised by the miscreance of the world. The characteristics of the deity are transferred to the world itself. It is because of this tendency of miscreance that the philosophy of deism arises, in which God is viewed not as a supernatural being, but rather as a natural being. We can assume that God had created the world. But this world functions according to its own laws and the deity does not interfere in the affairs of people; it does not answer their prayers and appeals. In the uncognisable nature of God, Voltaire's views were similar to the spiritual search of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and, according to the words of L. Simon, only intellectual (for Voltaire) and sensual (for Rousseau) orientation distinguished them (Seamon, 1975). Voltaire was firmly convinced only in the idea of Providence, which in fact represented for him the real essence of religion (Rosenthal, 1955).

Voltaire's deism and anti-clericalism, as well as similar views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, can be regarded as a means to purify the religion of their time. Both thinkers were united in the metaphysical foundations of their position, which presupposed the existence of God (Tate, 1969). The texts of Voltaire reveal his deepest acquaintance with both the books of the New Testament and the Old Testament, where the Book of Genesis (Ages, 1966) is widely quoted. Voltaire addressed other books of the Old Testament on occasion in his private correspondence (Voltaire, 1988). Voltaire's critical position is related to his interest in Judaism, which he regards as the immediate predecessor of Christianity and the religion of the authors of the Old Testament texts – who, however, could not rise to the 'universal, natural religion' he sought.

The question arises of how the evil in the world, the lack of harmony, can be explained. Here Pascal's influence on Voltaire is traced. Pascal says that the evil in the world is connected with the sinfulness of man, and all the dignity of the latter lies in the fact that he is a 'thinking cane'. Voltaire's views demonstrate a definite evolution from the concept of human free will to determinism (Nablow, 2003). Voltaire calls the man a "thinking atom", devised to stoically experience the evil. The evil is the result of luxury and the appearance of a refined culture. That is, the moral weakness of a person is the cause of evil. Voltaire says history is driven by passions that must be controlled by reason. He writes (1988): 'These passions, the abuse of which really brings so much evil, are in fact the root cause of the order we are now observing on Earth.' Therefore, in order to eliminate the evil and make life acceptable, action is needed, rather than theoretical speculation.

Voltaire enters into a well-known debate with Leibniz's concept, emphasising the contemporary in European thought from at least the thirteenth century problem of theodication, clearly manifested during the discussion of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (Neiman, 2002). Voltaire's *Candide* will have a long-lasting influence on European thought,

being reflected in a number of subsequent interpretations, including those that are close enough to us in time (Morrison, 2002).

Man is driven by passions, and thus he seems to be making his own story, because in essence he is a contradictory being. Inconsistency is not a disadvantage, but rather an explosive energy that allows a person to constantly strive for something. In contradictions of human nature, Voltaire sees human dignity. Human life can be improved if social institutions and forms of human behaviour are transformed on the basis of reason, if scientific ideas supersede the religious ideas. That is when the progress is possible (especially in the mind). History suggests that people are capable of becoming enlighteners. To be an educator is to abandon all heroic adventures. To transform society, Voltaire wanted to use the monarchy, the power – he spoke of an absolute enlightened monarchy. Enlightenment is the force that is capable of forcing the government to reasonably use power in order to satisfy the interests of all subjects.

Conclusion

The epoch of the French Enlightenment, in the person of its bright representative Voltaire, was a powerful indicator of the development of philosophical thought. The inherited, already established tradition of thinking, in combination with the changed historical conditions, provoked a new type of discursiveness, in which satire played a key role. Voltaire's irony gets its methodical resolution from the method of simplifying reality, complemented by philosophical monologism. In its polemical orientation, the educational mind is called upon to unravel all the contradictions of the new social reality. Voltaire makes an extensive use of rhetorical devices and sophistic technique. In particular, he refers to the ironic type of thinking characteristic of him. The stylistic originality of Voltaire's philosophical reasoning is marked by the creation of polemical situations of incomprehension and stupidity, the projection, simplification and use of the method of imaginary experience, of the estrangement. The ideas of the Enlightenment were easily assimilated far and wide, and soon turned into a balagan trick, a farce.

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