

CfA for a workshop on:

Criticism of religion in the early Enlightenment and the associated change in the understanding of nature and normativity

In recent years, the close coupling between the concepts of modernity and secularization has loosened. At the same time, the interest in the relationship between religion and the Enlightenment has been growing, and so has the insight in the academia into the necessity to critically examine the concept of an ‘enlightened Christianity’ and discuss anew questions such as: What is the record of the Enlightenment? What has been achieved? What, historically speaking, was its program of religious criticism? What insights can still be gained from the approaches of that time? And what significance can we still ascribe to them today? These questions are relevant not only from the perspective of theology and political philosophy but also regarding modern societies and their challenges of coping with religious plurality, including the difference between orthodox forms of religion and increasingly free-floating religiosity. The purpose of this workshop is to find some answers to these pressing questions by analyzing and discussing the history of enlightenment with regards to its criticism of religion in general and Christianity in particular.

(1) We start from the insight that the Enlightenment can no longer be understood as a homogeneous tradition of thought but has a plural form – a finding to which the discussion on “radical enlightenment” has contributed significantly. This strand of the Enlightenment is particularly relevant for the purposes of the workshop because it is attributed to those thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries who did not want to limit themselves solely to a redesign of the political order – now conceived as liberal, heretical – but wanted to make all areas of the new society (now particularly understood as egalitarian) the object of their emancipatory reorganization. Can the critique of religion be reduced to a critique of the claim to truth of religious narratives? Or does criticism of religion (necessarily) go beyond that and formulate a comprehensive claim to practice?

(2) However, is the distinction between the private and public spheres of religion associated with a reduction strategy that seeks to push religion (as far as possible) out of public life? Or does the critique of religion look for space(s) for the self-reflexive moderation of religion, which in the sense of a *modus vivendi* could prevent a separation in religious questions? These questions characterize a second set of issues to be discussed at the workshop. For this purpose, not only the respective institutional design for shaping the relationship between politics and

religion is to be subjected to closer examination. In addition, it is necessary to sound out how differently the weights in the ‘triangle’ of reason – nature – normativity are distributed.

(3) What internal measure does modern criticism of religion set against it? Or does it ultimately sacrifice its critical impulse on the altar of human perfectibility and the principles underlying this process of progress? The workshop in its third complex is dedicated to these questions. In this third complex, it is also the place to take up again the enrichment of the Enlightenment by thinkers of radical enlightenment. For these prove to be largely immune against an absolutization of reason – also because some of its representatives place themselves in the tradition of skepticism, which blocks itself against any divination, be it of man or of his principles. Their concept of normativity not only takes the human being as the starting point for their own man-made designs of order, it also keeps an eye on the human world of experience as the yardstick for the means and ends, which is why the demands of normativity here always oscillate between the is and the ought of human nature.

The abovementioned questions can be taken as broad guidelines of the discussions the workshop aims at. Against this background, we are seeking a wide range of contributions, but also encourage contributions that want to discuss related topics. The workshop will take place 27/28, February 2020 at the Frankfurt University (Normative Order Building). Limited funds may be made available to help offset travel costs. Abstracts should be submitted before 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019 to [lembecke@politik.uni-kiel.de](mailto:lembecke@politik.uni-kiel.de) and [buddeberg@soz.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:buddeberg@soz.uni-frankfurt.de) and should have a length of 500 words (at max.). Accepted speakers will be notified by 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020.