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Editorial

Reason and Political Power: Political Power in light of the Enlightenment and French Revolution

The anthropological and political ideas of the Enlightenment and its culminating moment in the French Revolution lie at the foot of the entire modern socio-political order. Rationalism, secularism, and human rights are among the fundamental ideological building blocks of most XIX-century political movements. To understand the intellectual foundations of modern European civilization, one must first understand Enlightenment era anthropology and political thought.

From the perspective of political reflection, the Enlightenment is primarily a period in which the contemporary idea of the social contract is shaped, its basis being formulated by Thomas Hobbes in the mid-XVII century. John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau laid the foundations for modern political thought – thus creating an intellectual context for political and philosophical investigations – by way of their reflections on human nature, the relationship between reason and the passions, and the causes and essence of the genesis of the state.

One of the most outstanding philosophers of the Enlightenment, writing near the end of that period, is Immanuel Kant. The significance of his contributions to both the fields of theoretical philosophy (*Critique of Pure Reason*) and practical philosophy (*Critique of Practical Reason*, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*) cannot be understated. The optimism concerning man, characteristic of the age, and the a priori approach are both reflected in Kant's important political work *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*.

The nineteenth century was a time during which many new ideas and political movements formed in Europe. Events at the turn of the century and dynamic economic growth had a significant influence on the crystallization of these movements and ideas. The development of liberalism, socialism, social democracy and communism, anarchism, conservatism and Catholic social teaching, positivism, and national liberation movements had a profound effect on the shaping of socio-political order both in Europe and the rest of the world.

This century of enormous industrial development also introduced a new superpower on the scene – the United States of America. Though the United States would not have a true global influence until the following century, the young nation already had the attention of many European political thinkers, mainly on account of its unique socio-political system. One of the most outstanding of these thinkers was Alexis de Tocqueville, whose reflections on American democracy remain one of the most important sources for analyses of both the political history of the United States and the essence of modern democracy with the aporias that characterize it.

The current issue of *Horizons of Politics* is dedicated to analyzing select aspects of Enlightenment and XIX-century political reflection, presented within the context of discussions on human nature and the nature of political power.

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