Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [dare to know] "Have courage to use your own understanding!"--that is the motto of enlightenment.

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance (natura-liter maiorennes), nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity, and why it is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians. It is so easy to be immature. If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay: others will readily undertake the irksome work for me. The guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men have carefully seen to it that the far greatest part of them (including the entire fair sex) regard taking the step to maturity as very dangerous, not to mention difficult. Having first made their domestic livestock dumb, and having carefully made sure that these docile creatures will not take a single step without the go-cart to which they are harnessed, these guardians then show them the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone. Now this danger is not actually so great, for after falling a few times they would in the end certainly learn to walk; but an example of this kind makes men timid and usually frightens them out of all further attempts.

Thus, it is difficult for any individual man to work himself out of the immaturity that has all but become his nature. He has even become fond of this state and for the time being is actually incapable of using his own understanding, for no one has ever allowed him to attempt it. Rules and formulas, those mechanical aids to the rational use, or rather misuse, of his natural gifts, are the shackles of a permanent immaturity. Whoever threw them off would still make only an uncertain leap over the smallest ditch, since he is unaccustomed to this kind of free movement. Consequently, only a few have succeeded, by cultivating their own minds, in freeing themselves from immaturity and pursuing a secure course.

But that the public should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, if it is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable. For even among the entrenched guardians of the great masses a few will always think for themselves, a few who, after having themselves thrown off the yoke of immaturity, will spread the spirit of a rational appreciation for both their own worth and for each person's calling to think for himself. But it should be particularly noted that if a public that was first placed in this yoke by the guardians is suitably aroused by some of those who are altogether incapable of enlightenment, it may force the guardians themselves to remain under the yoke--so pernicious is it to instill prejudices, for they finally take revenge upon their originators, or on their descendants. Thus a public can only attain enlightenment slowly. Perhaps a revolution can overthrow autocratic despotism and profiteering or
power-grabbing oppression, but it can never
truly reform a manner of thinking; instead,
new prejudices, just like the old ones they
replace, will serve as a leash for the great
unthinking mass.

Nothing is required for this
enlightenment, however, except freedom; and
the freedom in question is the least harmful of
all, namely, the freedom to use reason publicly
in all matters. But on all sides I hear: "Do not
argue!" The officer says, "Do not argue, drill!"
The tax man says, "Do not argue, pay!" The
pastor says, "Do not argue, believe!" (Only one
ruler in the World says, "Argue as much as you
want and about what you want, but obey!") In
this we have examples of pervasive restrictions
on freedom. But which restriction hinders
enlightenment and which does not, but instead
actually advances it? I reply: The public use of
one's reason must always be free, and it alone
can bring about enlightenment among
mankind; the private use of reason may,
however, often be very narrowly restricted,
without otherwise hindering the progress of
enlightenment. By the public use of one's own
reason I understand the use that anyone as a
scholar makes of reason before the entire
literate world. I call the private use of reason
that which a person may make in a civic post
or office that has been entrusted to him. Now
in many affairs conducted in the interests of a
community, a certain mechanism is required
by means of which some of its members must
conduct themselves in an entirely passive
manner so that through an artificial unanimity
the government may guide them toward public
ends, or at least prevent them from destroying
such ends. Here one certainly must not argue,
instead one must obey. However, insofar as
this part of the machine also regards himself as
a member of the community as a whole, or
even of the world community, and as a
consequence addresses the public in the role of
a scholar, in the proper sense of that term, he
can most certainly argue, without thereby
harming the affairs for which as a passive
member he is partly responsible. Thus it
would be disastrous if an officer on duty who
was given a command by his superior were to
question the appropriateness or utility of the
order. He must obey. But as a scholar he
cannot be justly constrained from making
comments about errors in military service, or
from placing them before the public for its
judgment. The citizen cannot refuse to pay the
taxes imposed on him; indeed, impertinent
criticism of such levies, when they should be
paid by him, can be punished as a scandal
(since it can lead to widespread
insubordination). But the same person does
not act contrary to civic duty when, as a
scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts
regarding the impropriety or even injustice of
such taxes. Likewise a pastor is bound to
instruct his catecumens and congregation in
accordance with the symbol of the church he
serves, for he was appointed on that condition.
But as a scholar he has complete freedom,
indeed even the calling, to impart to the public
all of his carefully considered and well-
tentioned thoughts concerning mistaken
aspects of that symbol, as well as his
suggestions for the better arrangement of
religious and church matters. Nothing in this
can weigh on his conscience. What he teaches
in consequence of his office as a servant of the
church he sets out as something with regard to
which he has no discretion to teach in accord
with his own lights; rather, he offers it under
the direction and in the name of another. He
will say, "Our church teaches this or that and
these are the demonstrations it uses." He
thereby extracts for his congregation all
practical uses from precepts to which he would
not himself subscribe with complete
conviction, but whose presentation he can
nonetheless undertake, since it is not entirely
impossible that truth lies hidden in them, and,
in any case, nothing contrary to the very nature
of religion is to be found in them. If he
believed he could find anything of the latter
sort in them, he could not in good conscience
serve in his position; he would have to resign.
Thus an appointed teacher's use of his reason
for the sake of his congregation is merely
private, because, however large the
peace treaties. One age cannot bind itself, and power, by parliaments, and by the most solemn
condition whereby it would be impossible for subsequently those congrلعبutions that, in accord
with their newly gained insight, had organized themselves under altered religious institutions,
but without interfering with those wishing to allow matters to remain as before. However, it is
absolutely forbidden that they unite into a religious organization that nobody may for the
duration of a man's lifetime publicly question,
for so-doing would deny, render fruitless, and make detrimental to succeeding generations an
era in man's progress toward improvement. A man may put off enlightenment with regard to
what he ought to know, though only for a short time and for his own person; but to renounce it
for himself, or, even more, for subsequent generations, is to violate and trample man's divine rights underfoot. And what a people may not decree for itself may still less be imposed on it by a monarch, for his lawgiving authority rests on his unification of the people's collective will in his own. If he only sees to it that all genuine or purported improvement is consonant with civil order, he can allow his subjects to do what they find necessary to their spiritual well-being, which is not his affair. However, he must prevent anyone from forcibly interfering with another's working as best he can to determine and promote his well-being. It detracts from his own majesty when he interferes in these matters, since the writings in which his subjects attempt to clarify their insights lend value to his conception of governance. This holds whether he acts from his own highest insight—whereby he calls upon himself the reproach, "Caesar non eat supra grammaticos."—as well as, indeed even more, when he despoils his highest authority by supporting the spiritual despotism of some tyrants in his state over his other subjects.

If it is now asked, "Do we presently live in an enlightened age?" the answer is, "No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment." As matters now stand, a great deal is still lacking in order for men as a whole
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272 to be, or even to put themselves into a position
to be able without external guidance to apply
understanding confidently to religious issues.
But we do have clear indications that the way
is now being opened for men to proceed freely
in this direction and that the obstacles to
general enlightenment—to their release from
their self-imposed immaturity—are gradually
diminishing. In this regard, this age is the age
of enlightenment, the century of Frederick.

A prince who does not find it beneath
him to say that he takes it to be his duty to
prescribe nothing, but rather to allow men
complete freedom in religious matters—who
thereby renounces the arrogant title of
tolerance—is himself enlightened and deserves
to be praised by a grateful present and by
posterity as the first, at least where the
government is concerned, to release the human
race from immaturity and to leave everyone
free to use his own reason in all matters of
conscience. Under his rule, venerable pastors,
in their role as scholars and without prejudice
to their official duties, may freely and openly
set out for the world's scrutiny their judgments
and views, even where these occasionally
differ from the accepted symbol. Still greater
freedom is afforded to those who are not
restricted by an official post. This spirit of
freedom is expanding even where it must
struggle against the external obstacles of
governments that misunderstand their own
function. Such governments are illuminated
by the example that the existence of freedom
need not give cause for the least concern
regarding public order and harmony in the
commonwealth. If only they refrain from
inventing artifices to keep themselves in it,
men will gradually raise themselves from
barbarism.

I have focused on religious matters in
setting out my main point concerning
enlightenment, i.e., man's emergence from
self-imposed immaturity, first because our
rulers have no interest in assuming the role of
their subjects' guardians with respect to the arts
and sciences, and secondly because that form
of immaturity is both the most pernicious and
disgraceful of all. But the manner of thinking
of a head of state who favors religious
enlightenment goes even further, for he
realizes that there is no danger to his
legislation in allowing his subjects to use
reason publicly and to set before the world
their thoughts concerning better formulations
of his laws, even if this involves frank
criticism of legislation currently in effect. We
have before us a shining example, with respect
to which no monarch surpasses the one whom
we honor.

But only a ruler who is himself
enlightened and has no dread of shadows, yet
who likewise has a well-disciplined, numerous
army to guarantee public peace, can say what
no republic may dare, namely: "Argue as much
as you want and about what you want, but
obey!" Here as elsewhere, when things are
considered in broad perspective, a strange,
unexpected pattern in human affairs reveals
itself, one in which almost everything is
paradoxical. A greater degree of civil freedom
seems advantageous to a people's spiritual
freedom; yet the former established impassable
boundaries for the latter; conversely, a lesser
degree of civil freedom provides enough room
for all fully to expand their abilities. Thus,
when nature has removed the hard shell from
this kernel for which she has most fondly
cared, namely, the inclination to and vocation
for free thinking, the kernel gradually reacts on
a people's mentality (whence they become
increasingly able to act freely), and it finally
even influences the principles of government,
which finds that it can profit by treating men,
who are now more than machines, in accord
with their dignity.

I. Kant
Konigsberg in Prussia, 30 September 1784