

INTRODUCTION

In 1784 Kant wrote a short magazine article entitled 'What is Enlightenment?' Kant, not normally known for his brevity, came up with one of the most quoted characterizations of Enlightenment:

[Enlightenment is the] emergence of man from his self-imposed infancy. Infancy is the inability to use one's reason without the guidance of another. It is self-imposed, when it depends on a deficiency, not of reason, but of the resolve and courage to use it without external guidance. Thus the watchword of enlightenment is: *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use one's own reason!

Enlightenment, as Kant characterizes it, is increasingly viewed with suspicion. It's claimed that the rise of Kantian Enlightenment in the West has resulted in the undermining of external moral authority and its replacement by individual moral autonomy. This in turn has resulted in the collapse of morality itself, with all the attendant anti-social consequences we see around us today: the escalation in crime and delinquency; sexual irresponsibility and the rise in single parent families; a greedy, self-serving, individualistic culture. According to many social commentators, as a direct result of Kant's Enlightenment vision, the fabric of Western civilization is now under threat. As one well-known British journalist puts it,

[t]he great paradox of the Enlightenment was that, in liberating human thought in order to enhance civilization, it lit a slow fuse beneath it.

Indeed, this same journalist follows philosophers like Lyotard in blaming the Enlightenment for the Holocaust. I am not going to take issue with that suggestion here. But do bear it in mind as you read the first two articles in this issue of *Think*. The

articles are written by thinkers from the Islamic world, thinkers who agree with Salman Rushdie that the Islamic world is now in desperate need of an Enlightenment of its own.

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