

What was Moderate about the Enlightenment? Moderation in Eighteenth century Europe

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Datum, Ort: 17.01.2022–18.01.2022, Newcastle

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Among the readings of the enlightenment which have been proposed since historians started turning their attention to the enlightenment after the Second World War, it is probably the Radical Enlightenment which today is most pervasive. The Radical Enlightenment, proposed most vociferously by Jonathan Israel, the subject of monographs and edited volumes, is said to contain the key to modernity, a secular world-view, and a commitment to the rights of man. In promoting democracy and secularism, it clashed with religious orthodoxy and the *ancien regime*. It also clashed with a „moderate enlightenment“ which endorsed a compromise between reason and revelation and sought to accommodate the forces of modernity with those of traditional authority. In this formulation, moderate enlightenment is defined negatively, a „moderate mainstream“ undermining a substantive Radicalism. This conference sought a different approach to the prospect of a moderate enlightenment. It asked not how moderate enlightenment related to radical enlightenment but rather: „What was the relationship between moderation and enlightenment?“ „How was moderation thought about in 18th century Europe?“ In asking these questions it proposed to cast new light upon histories of both enlightenment and moderation, and bring new meaning to the political-philosophical significance of each.

The conference began at the end of enlightenment, with a panel on the relationship between moderation and revolution. MATTHIJS LOK (Amsterdam) examined the relations between the counter-revolutionary movement of the early 19th century and the moderate, Catholic Enlightenment from which it emerged. Moderation, for Lok, was a central attribute in a narrative Europeans

have told about themselves: a civilizational paradigm, which combined the values of pluralism, freedom, gradual progress through incremental reform, and throughout the retention of balance between opposed categories. It was in the writings of early 19th century historians – Lok’s lens here was focused on Nikolaus Voigt – that this master-narrative about moderation and civilization as „historical Europeanism“, took root.

Lok’s paper was followed by studies on two actors in the French Revolution. CARLOS PEREZ CRESPO (Hamburg) presented a study on the Abbé Sieyès, which interpreted his constitutional thought as an attempt to moderate Rousseauian ideals of popular sovereignty. Perez Crespo spoke from the perspective of political science – his concern was to differentiate Sieyès’ constitutional order from those of Locke and Montesquieu, and instead propose its Kantian basis. It resembled less a balance of powers and more a single power expressed in two entities, the monarch and the legislator.

A more historical paper was offered by NICOLAI VON EGGERS (Copenhagen) who provided an analysis of the Comte de Monlosier, which turned upon Monlosier’s explicit advocacy of moderation, against violence, in the context of the souring of the French Revolution after 1792. The „sceptre of moderation“ invoked in Monlosier’s „Des effets de la violence et de la moderation“ (1796) provided a lasting resource for European political thinkers uncomfortable with the revolution. And yet, as von Eggers showed, Monlosier was no simple traditionalist; his appeal to institutions and authorities was tempered by his recognition of how they changed over time.

The second panel moved chronologically back into the 18th century proper. The first two contributions remained in France. SHIRU LIM (Aarhus) considered the political implications of philosophical discourses about stage-acting, looking at the aesthetic theories of Jean-Baptiste Dubos and at Diderot’s writings, especially his dialogue „Paradoxe sur le comédien“. Both dwelled upon the question of artificiality which acting brought to the fore: Lim’s proposal was that a grasp of the artificial reality offered on the stage could

transpose into a discourse about civility and, in her words, „managing disagreeability“.

Staying with Diderot, DAMIEN TRICOIRE (Trier) surveyed the *philosophe's* thought to reclaim him from the Radical Enlightenment. For Tricoire, Diderot's political views were not radical but moderate, advocating for a monarchy tempered by intermediary powers, in a long French tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages. Diderot's advocacy for a more „radical“ politics from the 1770s was not triggered by an intellectual shift but rather by events, namely the suppression of the French *parlements* by Louis XV in 1771. Diderot was defending a form of the Ancient Constitution.

PAULS DAIJA (Riga) moved north-east to pose a critical assessment of the „moderate enlightenment“ in the Baltic. His narrative fixed on the problem of serfdom and its relationship to the publishing of vernacular translations of German *Aufklärung* texts. Moderate enlighteners, in this context, sought to prepare peasants for freedom and maturity, and countered claims this would make them disobedient and „too clever“. Nonetheless, the question of how much education is too much was a concern. Moderates, in Daija's formulation, „supported serfdom while paving the way for its erosion“, and with it, for the nationalist movements of the nineteenth century.

The first day's discussion was closed with a keynote lecture by JOHN ROBERTSON (Cambridge). Robertson began with a note of scepticism about the prospect of a „moderate enlightenment“: while moderation was undoubtedly an enlightenment value, it is not obvious that moderate enlightenment is a useful conjunction. He gave a survey of the uses of moderation in Hume. On politics, and as a philosophical sceptic, Hume's moderation shines through clear. However, in other areas – religion for instance – it is less meaningful to call Hume a moderate. A parallel case was presented, in the private letters of an enlightened monarch, Carlo di Borbone. Here again the rule of moderation was endorsed, but its presence as a coherent intellectual formation is unclear. Robertson concluded that if a case is to be made for a moderate enlightenment, it must turn upon more than the usage of the term itself. On these grounds he provided

a review of twentieth-century enlightenment historiography. For Robertson, the key question for historians of enlightenment has been the relationship between enlightenment and revolution. Prior to the Second World War it was widely assumed that the enlightenment led to political revolution. Since the 1950s historians have revised this view by providing a more comprehensive view of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European intellectual life. It is in this context that both a case for the enlightenment's moderation, and Israel's case for a radical enlightenment which was betrayed by rather than culminating in the French Revolution, might be understood. Robertson finished with a warning: bifurcating the enlightenment into radical and moderate camps has its limits. It threatens to confuse, and at worst trivialize, new areas of concern, for instance on race in enlightenment thought. Rather than keep thinking about moderate enlightenment and radical enlightenment, historians must, in Robertson's view, carry on thinking about enlightenment itself.

The next panel dealt with three women intellectuals and their political philosophies of moderation. MATILDA AMUNDSEN BERGSTROM (Gothenburg) looked at the Swedish intellectual Hedvig Charlottia Nordenflycht, a key figure in the Swedish reception and accommodation of Enlightenment thought through the medium of her „philosophical verse“. Nordenflycht sought a *via media*, or „steady pathway“, between, on the one hand, the philosophies of Newton, Locke, Leibniz and Bayle, and, on the other hand, a Lutheran state church deeply suspicious of new currents of thought.

Anna Barbauld's different model of accommodation was presented by NATASHA LOMONOSSOFF (Kingston, Canada). Barbauld was committed to radical political ends, but recognised the need to persuade a conservative mainstream. Civil disobedience, in her view, would lead only to jeopardise the ends of reform. What was needed was restraint, in Lomonossoff's words, a „tempered resistance“.

A different moderation was present in GEERTJE BOL's (Oxford) protagonist, Mary Astell. Often recognised for her proto-feminist views, Bol framed Astell – a High

Church Tory – within the theological debates of her time. Astell participated in a pamphlet-debate about religious conformity within which the concept of moderation became embroiled. Against the model of tolerationist moderation proposed by non-conformists, Bol presented Astell's alternative, „scripture moderation“, the pursuit with zeal of spiritual ends, and indifference to worldly goods.

The following panel focused exclusively on British accounts of moderation. ELAD CARMEL (Jerusalem) looked at Robert Wallace, who presented himself as a „moderate freethinker“. Carmel pulled apart this moniker, and presented Wallace's freethinking as the pursuit of the truth by avoiding the two extremes of dogmatic fideism and radical scepticism.

ROBERT STRIVENS (Bradford on Avon) offered a more theologically-bound model for pursuing truth in account of the English dissenter Philip Doddridge. Strivens gave a close reading of Doddridge's teaching curriculum delivered to dissenting churchmen. The eclecticism of Doddridge's teaching methods included theological treatises which directly opposed his own doctrinal beliefs. This was designed, in Strivens' reading, to avoid dogmatism and faction, and endorse instead epistemological modesty, wherein lay Doddridge's commitment to moderation.

Returning to Scotland, MARK MCLEAN (Edinburgh) presented on the Scottish scholar David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes. Much of his paper probed the relationship between Hailes and the „moderate literati“ of the Scottish Enlightenment. Hailes emerged on the „moderate“ side of this group, a philosophical sceptic but deeply uncomfortable with its implications, and concerned with peace within the church. Hailes' strained relations with Hume were reviewed, as was his critique of Gibbon. Ultimately, in McLean's reading, Hailes was happy to subordinate the case for enlightened civility to the case against infidelity.

The final panel moved to German-speaking Europe. MARC CAPLAN (Dusseldorf) approached enlightenment and moderation in a Jewish context. In a close study of the play „Reb Henoch“ by Isaac Euchel, a student of Kant, Caplan positioned the Jewish

Haskalah movement in its relation with both *Aufklärung* and *Kultur*, Enlightenment and Romanticism. The play's incorporation of Yiddish, Hebrew, German, French and other languages became a means to understand the Jewish intellectual as a „median man“, or a „riven figure“ only ever in part assimilated with mainstream enlightenment culture.

The two other papers drew upon the construction of German Pietism as a lens for thinking about moderation in the 18th century, but did so in very different ways. DORON AVRAHAM (Tel Aviv) presented a survey, proposing moderation to be a key value for pietists, and interpreting this principally through the lens of religious toleration. The individualistic dimension of pietistic faith legitimised a plurality of paths through which God could be sought, and with this justified toleration towards a plurality of confessions. In Avraham's study this toleration was even extended to Judaism, and even a species of „philo-semitism“ developing among Pietists.

A more variegated view of Pietism was presented by the last speaker, VERA FASSHAUER (Frankfurt am Main). She focused on divisions within pietism, and specifically on the founding of a radical pietist movement, represented by Johann Konrad Dippel, who advocated for a spiritual and mystical religiosity eschewed by more moderate pietists such as August Hermann Franke. The force of Fasshauer's interpretation was to show how the limits of what could constitute „moderate“ pietism were subject to change over time, and in response to specific disputes and interventions. Ultimately, she left open the question of which group should be designated „moderate“: those who were more orthodox, or those who actively promoted toleration.

Fasshauer's question captured the tensions that ran through many of the papers delivered in this conference – whether moderate as adjective attained meaning in relation to a radical alternative, or held substantive meaning bound up with an ideal of moderation. NICHOLAS MITHEN (Newcastle) posed this question in his concluding remarks. To better assess the value of the „moderate enlightenment“ as a category we need to become more adept at using „moderate“ as a

signifying term. In this conference „moderate“ sometimes referred to a rhetorical strategy, sometimes to a narrative individuals or groups told about themselves, and sometimes to the negation of something deemed more radical. However, it also is bound with moderation as a concept that needs to be better understood. The papers showcased features of 18th-century intellectual life often associated with moderate enlightenment: religious toleration, compromise, a measured scepticism, epistemic modesty, a critique of enthusiasm, promotion of civility, a historical perspective. To what extent can these be tied to a concept of moderation? Was this concept sufficiently fixed in the 18th century? Was it in the midst of a longer process of conceptual transformation? We need answers to these questions if we are to advance our understandings of the enlightenment – moderate or otherwise – and of its saliency for the present moment. This conference has gone some way towards clarifying that task.

Conference overview:

Panel 1 – Moderation and Revolution

Chair: Rachel Hammersley (Newcastle)

Matthijs Lok (Amsterdam): *Discordia Concors: Pluralism, Moderation and the Transformation of the Enlightened Narrative of Europe (1790–1830)*

Carlos Perez Crespo (Hamburg): *Sieyès' Idea of Constituent Power: An Attempt to Moderate Sovereignty in the French Revolution?*

Nicolai von Eggers (Copenhagen): *Between Violence and Moderation: Montlosier and Debates on Strategy within the French Counter-Revolutionary Movement*

Panel 2 – Moderation and Civility in Enlightenment Europe

Chair: Nick Mithen (Newcastle)

Shiru Lim (Aarhus): *What's so Civil about Civility? Stage Acting and Managing Disagreeability in Eighteenth Century French Thought*

Damien Tricoire (Trier): *Diderot, a Moderate Writer?*

Pauls Daija (Riga): *Moderate Enlightenment: The Baltic Solution*

Keynote Lecture

John Robertson (Cambridge): *Enlightenment: „A Lesson in Moderation?“*

Panel 3 – Women Intellectuals and Political Philosophies of Moderation

Chair: Elias Buchetmann (Rostock)

Matilda Amundsen Bergström (Gothenburg): *Reason's Steady Pathway. Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht on Philosophical Moderation*

Natasha Lomonosoff (Queens, Canada): *Radical Pragmatism: The Role of Moderation in Two of Anna Barbauld's Political Pamphlets*

Geertje Bol (Oxford): *Mary Astell on Moderation: The Case of Occasional Conformity*

Panel 4 – Moderation and Religion in the British Isles

Chair: Katie East (Newcastle)

Elad Carmel (Jerusalem): *Moderation in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Case of Robert Wallace*

Robert Strivens (Bradford on Avon): *Moderation in Early Eighteenth-Century English Dissent: Philip Doddridge and his Academy Curriculum*

Mark McLean (Edinburgh): *Orthodoxy in Moderation: Lord Hailes and the Moderate Literati of Scotland*

Panel 5 – Moderation in German-Speaking Europe

Chair: Simon Mills (Newcastle)

Marc Caplan (Dusseldorf): *„Don't Mess with a Median Man“: The Contradictions of Mediation and Moderation in Isaac Euchel's „Reb Henoch: Oder Woß tut me damit?“ (1793)*

Doron Avraham (Bar Ilan): *From Confessional Dogmatism to Religious Moderation: The Case of German Pietism*

Vera Fasshauer (Frankfurt am Main / Gotha): *Moderation of the Moderate? Johann Konrad Dippel's Quarrel with the Halle Pietists*

Concluding Remarks

Nicholas Mithen (Newcastle)

Tagungsbericht *What was Moderate about the Enlightenment? Moderation in Eighteenth century Europe*. 17.01.2022–18.01.2022, Newcastle, in: H-Soz-Kult 09.03.2022.