

Name

Professor

Course Title

Date

What is the Meaning of Enlightenment in Philosophy?

Enlightenment is a concept that helps to distinguish between public and private reason. Immaturity is the main factor that determines whether an individual's mode of reasoning can be described as private or public. Immanuel Kant described enlightenment as a process through which a man overcomes the stage of self-imposed immaturity. He went ahead to describe immaturity as a situation where an individual is unable to use his or her own understanding without relying on the guidance of another person. He considers immaturity to be self-imposed because it is likely caused by the failure of an individual to develop courage and resolve to use his or her understanding. Self-imposed immaturity is a catalyst for laziness and cowardice. Due to immaturity, people do not exert themselves anymore because they do not think; hence, they rely on others to think on their behalf. In the long run, most people find it difficult to walk out of the self-imposed immaturity because it has become a natural part of them (Kant, p. 38). Of concern is to establish the distinction that exists between private and public reason as a means of establishing what enlightenment is all about.

It is worth noting that Kant does not have a typical description of public and private reason. The distinction between public and private reason comes into play in the process of trying to establish the limitations of free speech. Kant observes that enlightenment has everything to do with freedom which allows people to reason publicly in all matters. However, this is not the case as people who are in authority are hell bent on suppressing dissenting voices

or opinions while in the process of carrying out their official duties. Failure to use public reason is associated with a prevalence of restricting one's freedom (Timmons & Johnson, p, 67).

Therefore, it is important to establish which restrictions are likely to come in the way of enlightenment and which are not. In this case, Kant is of the view that public reason can bring about enlightenment if at all it is always free. On the other hand, the use of private reason may be subject to narrow restrictions which do not have to hinder the process of enlightenment.

Kant describes public reason as a means through which a scholar makes the use of reason in the presence of the entire literate world. On the part of private reason, Kant describes it as the process through which a person may use reason while carrying out his or her duties in an office or a civic post. There are many initiatives that are put in place and they are meant to cater for the interests of a community. Those who are required to implement these initiatives are expected to conduct themselves in a passive manner. In this case, these people are not expected to argue but instead, they are required to obey whatever it is they are directed to do. Furthermore, an officer on duty is not required to question the utility or appropriateness of an order given by his superior. All the officer is required to do is to obey the order. As a scholar, the officer cannot be restricted from making comments of how the military service is prone to errors, or placing his concerns before the public so that they can make their own judgment (O'Neill, p. 73). A citizen does not have the privilege of refusing to pay taxes that have been imposed on him, or else they risk being prosecuted. However, the citizen, as a scholar and as part of his civic duty, is entitled to air his thoughts publicly regarding the injustice or impropriety of taxes levied on him. In the case pastors, they are presented with an unrestricted freedom of public use of reasoning to speak their own mind and to use their own rational capacities. All these examples are used to illustrate the distinction that exists between public and private uses of reason.

According to Kant, public reason is a form of dialogue or communication that provides room for actual inclusive participation. He views public reason as an opportunity that seeks to ensure that the possibility of reasoning with others is not interfered with. On Kant's account, it is not possible for public reasoning to rely on principles that others might find it hard to follow. Kant's conception of public reasoning is considered to be modal and normative and it is applicable on the basis of ethical justification as opposed to democratic legitimation (Golash, 114). Kant developed surprising ways of establishing the distinction that exists between private and public uses of reason. For example, he classified the uses of reason that are based on ungrounded assumptions as private. Some of these assumptions include ideological or theological dogma, or the edicts of state or church. If the reasoning of Kant is anything to go by, public uses of reason involves those people who do not assume authority without justification; hence, their thoughts or ideas are likely to be followed or listened to by any audience. On the other hand, private uses of reason involves those people who cannot justify authority; hence, their thoughts or ideas may seem unreasonable or pointless to some audiences.

The debate surrounding public and private uses of reasoning often raises the question of whether people live in an enlightened age or an age of enlightenment. To find an answer to this question, Kant contends that people still lack a great deal that might enable them to confidently understand various issues without the need of external guidance. However, the way is being opened and the obstacles to general enlightenment are diminishing. Therefore, it can be said that people are living in age of enlightenment where they are being left free to use their own reason on matters touching on their conscience. Kant uses the example of pastors who allow the world to scrutinize their views and judgments. Such pastors often take up the role of scholars and they are not afraid of their roles being prejudiced. The culture of using public and private reason to

limit free speech has not helped people to lift themselves from barbarism. People should be allowed to air their thoughts before the world and leaders should allow their subjects to use their reasoning publicly and privately.

In conclusion, Kant is a great advocate of enlightenment and he uses this concept to create a distinction between public and private reason. The use of public and private reason is a means through which people overcome self-imposed immaturity. The immaturity is occasioned by the fact that there is a limitation of speech which might be caused by the absence or presence of private or public uses of reasoning. Kant considers that failure to embrace public reason is tantamount to limiting an individual's freedom and their desire for enlightenment. As for private reason, it does not necessarily hinder enlightenment nor does it limit an individual's freedom.

Works cited

Golash, D. *Freedom of Expression in a Diverse World*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2010. Print.

Kant, I. *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'* London: Penguin Books Limited, 2013. Print.

O'Neill, O. *Constructing Authorities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Print.

Timmons, M. & Johnson, R. N. *Reason, Value, and Respect: Kantian Themes from the Philosophy of Thomas E. Hill, Jr.* Oxford University Press, 2015. Print.