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How Activist Should Enlightenment Studies Be? Examples to Consider From Three Centuries

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Abstract. Those who pursue enlightenment want to change and shape their society. This was true for the Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century and also for many who later looked back on it, including scholars – right up to the present day. Activism can motivate efforts to gain knowledge, but it can also restrict it. The article explores this problem in a series of interlinked case studies: after a brief prelude with the Halle philosophers of the 18th century, first with the left-wing Hegelians in the 19th century and then with the Enlightenment research of the GDR, where individual prominent scholars were collaborators of the secret service, the Stasi. It concludes with reflections on how ideological constrictions can be avoided through pluralism.

Keywords: Enlightenment studies, Marxism, Political bias, Ideology.

1. WHAT DOES 'ACTIVIST' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENLIGHTENMENT' MEAN?

Semantically, an activist conception of the Enlightenment foregrounds its programme of criticism leading to reform, which indeed is a founding principle of the historical Enlightenment. Additionally, the 'pragmatics' of activism is characterized by the fact that the protagonists typically also see themselves as champions of Enlightenment and intent to contribute to the realization of the Enlightenment project by practical means, be it through writing, or political actions and public campaigning. This innate desire to have an impact derives from a view of one's own time as being not only particularly in need of Enlightenment, but also capable of progressive reform.

Enlightenment activism can be observed not only among the thinkers and actors of the eighteenth century, but also in later generations who saw parallels with their own struggles, invoked the historical idea of Enlightenment and claimed the mantle of responsibility for carrying the project forward. This tendency prevailed even in some areas of Enlightenment studies, although such activism risked blurring the boundaries between the scholar's methodical commitment to objectivity and the outcome desired by a partisan champion. I will present examples of these three activist approaches to Enlightenment.

My examples come from the German Enlightenment and its scholarly exploration because that is where I know best. I do not mean to say that Ger-

mans are particularly activist in their approaches to the Enlightenment. To be geographically accurate, the main setting of my story is Halle. This has historical reasons and at the same time gives me the opportunity to introduce you to the history of my academic home. It is a significant, but also not unproblematic heritage.

Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling (1671–1729), the jurist, philosopher and historian at the University of Halle, represents the historical Enlightenment (see below, section 2). Arnold Ruge (1802–1880) and other Hegelians on the left wing of the political spectrum belong to a later generation. In the run-up to the revolution of 1848, they revisited the contentions of the historical Enlightenment and took upon themselves the mission to see it through to fruition (section 3). Finally, the Enlightenment research pursued in the German Democratic Republic (1949–1990) is an example of scholarly work that was never entirely devoid of political activism conducted in the service of the socialist state and the Communist Party (section 4), sometimes even becoming involved in undercover operations on behalf of the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, the GDR's infamous state security service (section 5).

How the study of the Enlightenment came to be forged and fashioned in the GDR will be analysed in greater detail because it is closest to us in at least two respects: temporally, as very recent history, and conceptually, as it is an academic approach to the Enlightenment like our own. I will conclude with brief reflections on how activist Enlightenment research can be if it does not want to jeopardise its scientific nature. That said, the three stages analysed here show a pattern of steady intensification: from the pre-March period (i.e. preceding the March 1848 Revolution in the German Confederation) to the post-World War II era, Enlightenment activism increasingly took on the appearance of an ideology, with the activism of the GDR Enlightenment scholars proving to be the most outspoken.

2. A FIRST INVOCATION OF ENLIGHTENMENT IN 1715

One of the earliest exhibits of an Enlightenment programme is the title vignette and preface to *Gundlingiana*, Gundling's essay collection that appeared in 45 volumes from 1715 onwards. The vignette on the title page exemplifies what *Aufklärung* primarily signified around 1700, namely, the clearing up or brightening of the sky, especially as the sun breaks through the clouds (figure 1).

The explicit proclamation «*dispellam*» («I will disperse» or «I shall disperse» the clouds) sets a com-



Fig. 1. Frontispiece and title page of the *Gundlingiana*, vol. 1 (Halle 1715).

bative tone. The preface explains: «The truth is a light that enlightens everyone: it dispels all darkness: its motto, as I have had it set on the title page, is therefore “*dispellam*”¹». The anthropomorphising figure of the sun that inherently wields the power to disperse the clouds suggests that, for Gundling, the acuity of his mind represented a critical force for advancing the Enlightenment project.

As described in the preface, he sees himself partaking of and operating in a historical movement that begins with Grotius and Pufendorf, and in time attracts «many other brave men». Although in that process «the world» has become «wiser to some extent», the caveat, «[t]he dark clouds of error cannot be dissipated all at once»², suggests that in terms of both its duration and scope, Gundling understands the Enlightenment as a process of historic proportions set into motion by ‘actions’ of brave champions and not through merely waiting. Such activism, however, demands not only a high degree of self-assurance but also a combative attitude towards adversaries, at least verbally, through proclamations asserting that irrational attitudes like pedantry or superstition that oppose the truth should «finally

¹ [N. H. Gundling], *Gundlingiana, darinnen allerhand zur Jurisprudenz, Philosophie, Historie, Critic, Litteratur und übrigen Gelehrsamkeit gehörige Sachen abgehandelt werden*, Renger, Halle 1715, vol. I, *Vorrede*, non paginated [p. 4r]: «Dann die Wahrheit ist ein Licht, welches alle erleuchtet: Sie vertreibt alle Finsternüß: Ihre Devise, wie ich auf das Titelblatt setzen lassen, ist deßhalb *dispellam*.»

² [Gundling], *Gundlingiana*, cit., *Vorrede*, [p. 4v]: «Die Welt ist in einigen Stücken schon klüger als vor 100. Jahren. Die trübe Irrthums-Wolcken werden nicht auf einmahl zertheilet.»

be beaten down and kicked to the ground³». Gundling intensifies his attacks on the personal «enemies» of those championing the Enlightenment when he claims that the former will have «died of the poisonous ulcer of their envy and taken their boils with them⁴».

3. REAPPROPRIATION OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT BY THE HEGELIAN LEFT IN THE 1840S

As we see, from the very start one strand of Enlightenment thought was avowedly activist. 125 years later, its force is palpable again when the Enlightenment is powerfully invoked in Germany's pre-March 1848 era, the *Vormärz*, marking the beginning of a new phase in the history of the reception of the Enlightenment in Germany. Opponents of the Restoration sought to recover a positive view of the Enlightenment, after it had been challenged by the Romantics and religious conservatives as well as by Hegel. For the first time the Enlightenment is understood as a historical forerunner of one's own philosophical and political efforts: on the one hand, it is historicised, on the other, it is presented as excitingly ground-breaking and topical.

A sympathetic invocation of the Enlightenment in the *Vormärz* can already be found in Friedrich Christoph Schlosser's *Geschichte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts und des neunzehnten bis zum Sturz des französischen Kaiserreichs* (History of the 18th century and the 19th century until the fall of the French Empire), published in seven volumes between 1836 and 1848⁵. As a moderate liberal who was critical of the French *philosophes*, Schlosser saw himself as an adherent of the Enlightenment, insofar as it was not atheistically radicalised. Schlosser's understanding of the Enlightenment, however, cannot be called activist, for this Heidelberg historian saw himself as educator of a bourgeoisie defined primarily by its moral standards, not by its political activism.

Compared with that, the self-image of Arnold Ruge is shaped by a much stronger identification with the Enlightenment, and by an activist will to push ahead with the Enlightenment project. In a letter to Moritz Fleischer, a contributor to the *Rheinische Zeitung* (Rhenish Newspaper), which famously also published Karl Marx's journalistic writings, Ruge cheered: «The time

of Enlightenment is here again⁶». A few months later, Ruge, in a letter to Adolf Stahr, his co-editor for the Hegelian Lefts' most important journal *Hallische Jahrbücher* (Halle yearbooks), again put the spotlight on the present time: «Our time is the most foundational period of Enlightenment to have ever existed, rendering it necessary that we write like Voltaire and Rousseau». Ruge justifies this emphatic view of his own time by citing the political developments in «all of Europe» as indicative that the «correct interpretation of Hegel's philosophy» had finally been afforded by the Hegelian Left and the critics of the Christian faith, namely Friedrich David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer⁷. But in his view the reactionary forces had also gained momentum: «The police are getting nasty and the opposition is already there.» Nevertheless, Ruge is convinced that he is on the right side of a historical trend that must and will prevail. To ride that wave as a writer one would have to write along the lines of «Rousseau and Sieyès», the champions of the Revolution of 1789: «These men write swords and daggers; they are more powerful than canons and bayonets.»⁸

A more elaborate justification for the parallel between then and now is rendered in a review of Schlosser's *Geschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* in Ruge's journal, now renamed because of censorship. At the dawn of the Enlightenment, it went, the true light finally shone into the world:

Just as Christ was born during the reign of Augustus, so too was the Enlightenment during the time of the modern Augustus, Louis XIV, in order to send out its apostles all over the world under the reign of his successors. It is nothing but philosophy itself, but in a folksy, popular way, espousing people's consciousness, even world consciousness⁹.

³ *Ibidem*: «Die Pedanterey, der Aberglaube [...] muß doch endlich unten liegen, und zu Boden getreten werden.»

⁴ *Ibidem*: «Feinde [...] an dem giftigen Geschwür ihres Neides gestorben, und ihre Eiterbeulen mit sich genommen.»

⁵ See F. C. Schlosser, *Geschichte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts und des neunzehnten bis zum Sturz des französischen Kaiserreichs: mit besonderer Rücksicht auf geistige Bildung*, Mohr, Heidelberg 1836, vol. I, p. 3, 22, 388, 571-572, 578-579, 640.

⁶ A. Ruge's letter to M. Fleischer (23 February 1841), in *Der Redaktionsbriefwechsel der Hallischen, Deutschen und Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbücher*, ed. by M. Hundt, Akademie, Berlin 2010, vol. I, p. 688: «Die Zeit der Aufklärung ist wieder da».

⁷ Ruge's letter to A. Stahr (7 November 1841), in *Der Redaktionsbriefwechsel*, cit., vol. II, p. 864: «Unsre Zeit ist die fundamentalste Aufklärungsperiode, die es je gegeben hat, und es wird nöthig, wie Voltaire und Rousseau zu schreiben».

⁸ *Ibidem*, «Die Polizei wird eklig, und die Opposition ist es schon geworden» / «Die Entwicklung ist riesenstark» / «Die Kerle [i.e. Rousseau and Sieyès] schreiben Schwerter und Dolche, sie sind mächtiger als Kanonen und Bajonette».

⁹ [K. F. Köppen], [Review of] *Geschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts und des 19. bis zum Sturz des französischen Kaiserthums* [recte: Kaiserreichs]: von F. C. Schlosser, «Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst», 5:2-6 (1841), p. 5-7, 9-12, 13-14, 17-20, 21-23; p. 18: «Wie zur Zeit des Augustus Christus geboren wurde, so zur Zeit des modernen Augustus, Ludwig's XIV., die Aufklärung, um unter seinen Nachfolgern Apostel auszusenden in alle Welt. Sie ist nichts Anderes, als die Philosophie selbst, aber als populäre, als volksthümliche, als Volksbewußtsein, ja als

According to this Hegelian interpretation, only with the advent of the Enlightenment does humankind become conscious of what is necessary, both intellectually and historically. Just as important in the view of the Hegelian Left is the practical realisation of what is theoretically necessary: «But it [Enlightenment] still has to be realised, because it is still confronted with the enduring presence of the old monarchy and the Church»¹⁰. The French Revolution was only the «first [...] victory» of the Enlightenment, incomplete and of only limited impact, especially outside France¹¹. As the reviewer explains in an address to his readers in 1841, the interest in the eighteenth century «could not just be scholarly, historical, but also direct, practical», «since we are still completely caught up in its struggle»¹².

Much more could be said about the propensity of the pre-March 1848 radicals to parallel their own era with the previous century. Karl Friedrich Köppen, who wrote the Schlosser review¹³, dedicated an entire book to that parallel. On the face of it, the book is a eulogy for Frederick the Great in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of his accession to the throne in 1740. But packaged within Prussian patriotism is a resounding call to resume and realise the Enlightenment project, whose «intrinsic purpose» the author considers «a revolution», namely, to overthrow Christianity as well as the monarchical principle¹⁴. «Aurora rises; piercing wind blowing; but gloomy night clouds still lingering on the waters. When will we see the sun?»¹⁵ As this quote on the very first page of Köppen's book vividly demonstrates, the meteorological imagery originally accompanying the term *Aufklärung* was again taken up during the pre-March 1848 period.

Weltbewusstsein».

¹⁰ *Ibidem*: «Noch aber hat sie [die Aufklärung] sich erst zu verwirklichen, denn noch steht ihr als Positives die alte Monarchie und die Kirche gegenüber».

¹¹ *Ibidem*: «erster [...] Sieg».

¹² Ivi, p. 19: «zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert [...], das nicht bloß ein wissenschaftliches, historisches, sondern ein unmittelbares, praktisches Interesse für uns hat, da wir noch selbst ganz und gar in dessen Kampf befangen sind».

¹³ As Ruge notes in his letter to R. Prutz (9 January 1842), in *Der Redaktionsbriefwechsel*, cit., vol. II, p. 931. Köppen was one of the most active contributors to the yearbooks.

¹⁴ A passage from Köppen's Schlosser review that was abridged by the censors and that Ruge quotes in the same letter to Prutz (*ibidem*).

¹⁵ C. F. Köppen, *Friedrich der Grosse und seine Widersacher: eine Jubelschrift*, Wigand, Leipzig 1840, p. 1: «Morgenroth steigt herauf; scharfe Lüfte wehen; aber noch lagern düstre Nachtwolken auf den Gewässern. Wann werden wir die Sonne sehen?»

4. IN THE TRADITION OF THE HEGELIAN LEFT: ENLIGHTENMENT STUDIES IN THE GDR

A good one hundred years later, most GDR Enlightenment scholars agreed with the stance of the Hegelian Left on the Enlightenment in many respects, including the call for its revitalisation and the sense of superiority over less radical contemporaries or predecessors, who were cast deprecatingly as 'mere' liberals. As before, the Enlightenment was conceived as both a historical epoch and a 'mission' one sees oneself called to fulfil during one's own time, and in that sense it was both an object of study and a guiding principle¹⁶. Thus, although rooted in the feudal past, Enlightenment had lost none of its topicality¹⁷, and continued to function as a signpost to the future¹⁸.

Nevertheless, this identification with the historical Enlightenment was not entirely unqualified, either among the Hegelian Left of the 1840s, or among the Enlightenment scholars of the GDR. Both claimed to be superior and more advanced. The *Vormärz* radicals believed that they had benefited from the philosophical acuity of the Hegelian dialectic, in particular from a deeper insight into Hegel's understanding of historical necessity, an advantage the Enlightenment thinkers did not have. Scholars in the GDR shared this critique, but with an added reservation. Even as they recognised the foundational beginnings of materialistic thinking in the Enlightenment and among the Hegelian Left, they reserved their highest praise for Marx¹⁹.

¹⁶ W. Schröder et al., *Französische Aufklärung: bürgerliche Emanzipation, Literatur und Bewußtseinsbildung*, Reclam, Leipzig 1974, p. 748 (author of this part: W. Schröder).

¹⁷ See W. Bahner, *Übergreifende und spezifische Aspekte der europäischen Aufklärung (unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der romanischen Länder)*, in *Aufklärung als europäisches Phänomen: Überblick und Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. by W. Bahner, Reclam, Leipzig 1985, p. 5.

¹⁸ See [Schröder], *Französische Aufklärung*, cit., p. 672, with a quote from [Köppen], [Review of] *Geschichte*, cit., p. 5. That quote was also used by Bahner, *Übergreifende und spezifische Aspekte der europäischen Aufklärung*, cit., p. 5-110 (7).

¹⁹ See [Schröder], *Französische Aufklärung*, cit., p. 673, and the extensive criticism of the Hegelian Left in W. Krauss, *Karl Marx im Vormärz*, in W. Krauss, *Das wissenschaftliche Werk*, vol. I, *Literaturtheorie, Philosophie und Politik*, ed. by M. Naumann, de Gruyter, Berlin, Weimar 1987, p. 433-484; furthermore, with reference to Enlightenment, W. Krauss, *Die französische Aufklärung und die deutsche Geisteswelt*, in W. Krauss, *Das wissenschaftliche Werk*, vol. VII, *Aufklärung III: Deutschland und Spanien*, ed. by M. Fontius, with a note from R. Petermann and P.-V. Springborn, de Gruyter, Berlin, New York 1996, p. 231-249 (233-238). There is also a French translation of this essay: W. Krauss, *L'ère française des Lumières et les intellectuels allemands*, which appeared in the communist-influenced Parisian magazine «La Pensée», 123, 1965, p. 78-92. From a critical distance, see H. Möller, *Die Interpretation der Aufklärung in der marxistisch-leninistischen Geschichtsschreibung*, «Zeitschrift für historische Forschung», 4, 1977, p. 438-472 (441), on the propensity of GDR Enlightenment studies to refer to the Enlighten-

This blend of celebrating but in part also reproaching the Enlightenment does not represent a contradiction for the Hegelian Left or the GDR Marxists. Their progressivist concept of history both expects and demands that later epochs overcome the deficits of the earlier. In this concept, historical knowledge and the justification of one's own convictions are closely related: History is considered correctly understood when its course – as it is presented – leads up to the ideological point upheld by the historian. Of course, this line of thinking did not stem only from Enlightenment studies. In the GDR, the authoritative Marxist-Leninist worldview had pervaded the state, society and science, and it consequently underpinned the understanding of every programmatic text of the humanities. The general guideline of research was that of legitimising the state ideology; thus Enlightenment studies had to empirically prove that the progressive activists of the eighteenth century were precursors of socialism. As a result, the strain of activism that the GDR Enlightenment scholars typically espoused, in alignment with their enlightened self-image and their socialist convictions, also willy-nilly legitimised the dictatorship in which they lived and worked. Even an extremely competent and innovative scholar like Werner Krauss (1900–1976), who privately criticised the situation in the GDR²⁰, could not escape this trap.

Since socialism in the GDR had, by definition, drawn the right conclusions from the preceding course of history, the socialist order would now certainly result from the 'correctly' reconstructed history²¹. As a consequence, research was tasked with closing the circle twice: the philosophy of history would have to coincide with historical empiricism, just as all academic research had to coincide with the predefined ideology. In the GDR this applied to the humanities and the social sciences in general, but especially to Enlightenment studies, which were held in particularly high esteem. Consequently, research and scholarship were only considered successful if they aptly closed both circles. Failure to achieve this double closure spelled scientific weakness; but not attempting to do so represented an indefensible break with premises that were non-negotiable. This paved the way for a fundamentally anti-pluralistic premise to take root in GDR Enlightenment studies until 1989/1990, which meant that research could not acknowledge contingency, nor the

possibility of multiple outcomes. No ambiguity could be allowed to permeate the interpretation of the course of history, given that the 'task' of the Enlightenment was predefined. However, some changes could be observed in the 1980s. The ideological bias towards the sources gradually weakened, simple base-superstructure derivations declined and a certain degree of methodological pluralism – within the confines of the Marxist framework – came to be accepted.

5. AN ENLIGHTENMENT SCHOLAR IN THE SERVICE OF THE GDR'S STAATSSICHERHEITSDIENST

As an activist approach to Enlightenment studies in the GDR was required by the official ideology and was shaped by it, it is difficult to assess whether the commitment of particular scholars was motivated by personal conviction or merely represented the unavoidable fulfilment of a social contract. But let's take a closer look at one example: Ulrich Ricken (1926–2011), who taught French linguistics at the University of Halle for three decades. After Werner Krauss's death, he has been the GDR's most internationally renowned scholar of the Enlightenment. He also deserves the attention of ISECS because, as far as I know, he is the only GDR scholar to have been elected to the Executive Committee, which happened for the first time before the 1979 congress in Pisa, although there was no Society for the study of the 18th century in the GDR²². In 1987, after his re-election, Ricken was allowed to write a report on the Budapest congress in the «Neues Deutschland» (*New Germany*), the East-German «Prawda», and quote ISECS President Robert Darnton in praise of the «dialogue between East and West»²³. Indeed, our Society can be proud of having contributed to the détente between East and West. Ricken's personal story, however, has a dark underside.

Ricken was exceptionally active, politically and academically²⁴. In 1951, while still a student of Romance lan-

ment, while also distancing itself from it.

²⁰ See W. Krauss, *Briefe 1922 bis 1976*, ed. by P. Jehle in collaboration with E. Fillmann and P.-V. Springborn, Klostermann, Frankfurt/Main 2002, p. 648, 650, 652–53, 805, 827, 854 (1957–1967).

²¹ In Marxist terminology, Krauss explains this in his 1950 foreword to a volume of essays that was not published at the time: *Kurze Vorbemerkung über eine parteiliche Wissenschaft*, in Krauss, *Das wissenschaftliche Werk*, cit., vol. I, p. 5–6.

²² U. Ricken, *Curriculum vitae* (Lebenslauf), 16 November 1981, Member file in the archive of the Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

²³ U. Ricken, *Humanistisches Erbe aktuell befragt*, «Neues Deutschland», 8/9 August 1987, Bundesarchiv – Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv [German Federal Archives – Stasi Records Archives], Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS) [Ministry for State Security], Bezirksverwaltung (BV) Halle (Saale) [District Administration Halle Saale], Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. III, p. 211. Valuable insights into the new beginnings across the «Iron Curtain» at that time can be found in the conference report by L. Kontler, *Seventh international congress on the Enlightenment: Budapest 25th July – 2nd August, 1987*, «Danubian Historical Studies», 1, 1987, 4, p. 62–80. I would like to cordially thank László Kontler for the stimulating exchange following my talk in Rome.

²⁴ See D. Fulda, *Aufklärung(sforschung) im Sozialismus: ideologische Bedingungen und ihre Überwindung in der Gründungsphase des hal-*

guages and literatures, he wrote in his *curriculum vitae*, presumably included in his application for admission to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* – SED): «It is clear to me that we will have to revolutionise our so-called humanities to such a great extent as to allow it to fully serve a progressive development»²⁵. Party members, in particular, were expected to «actively participate», as stated in an «investigative report» of the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, for which *Staatssicherheitsdienst* or *Stasi* are common abbreviations) prior to Ricken's recruitment as so-called *Geheimer Mitarbeiter* (GM) or secret collaborator²⁶ (verbatim: «immer gesellschaftlich aktiv tätig»²⁷, or permanently socially active and involved; the pleonasm of German and foreign words here obviously suggesting greater emphasis). A GM was an undercover informer assigned to spy on people or organisations classified by the *Stasi* as hostile²⁸.

Ricken's *Stasi* files, running to more than eight hundred pages, leave no doubt about his involvement as a GM from 1959 to 1989. Initially, he operated in those capacities with prolonged interruptions; however, from 1975 onwards his involvement was permanent. Ricken had taken on that responsibility voluntarily, without any pressure or coercion, in line with his image as an active socialist²⁹. His task was to gain the trust of his French contact points, partly in France (where he had been assigned to keep an eye on persons employed at the universities he visited, including those involved in the Communist Party and GDR citizens teaching in France³⁰), partly in Halle and Berlin (where the focus was mainly on university teachers from France or the French cultural attachés³¹). While the GM reports primarily served

as information sources, their underlying purpose was to exert pressure on people who may have been potential recruits for the *Stasi*, or its opponents. Fortunately, it is arguable that Ricken's reports would probably not have served this latter purpose. As a rule, they paint a positive, even harmonious picture of the situation which he had to explore³². He rarely expressed critical assessments of third parties³³. Ricken was not a know-it-all spy seeking to harm others, that is not a true «Chekist», as his officers-in-charge noted with regret³⁴.

In Ricken's *Stasi* files, the keyword *Aufklärung* appears to mean two different things. On the one hand, it signifies the information gained through «secret intelligence gathering» about the categories of persons just mentioned³⁵. On the other hand, *Aufklärung* appears in his *Stasi* files increasingly frequently as the term we are familiar with for an epoch that remains topical, for Ricken's activities as an unofficial collaborator in the 1980s allowed him to closely pursue his academic goals in the field of Enlightenment studies. He also wrote reports on the ISECS, for example on political tensions before the 1987 congress was awarded to Hungary or the selection of participants for the first East-West young scholars' seminar held in West Berlin in 1989³⁶. Ricken's reports portray Enlightenment scholars in Western countries, and especially in France and Italy, as mostly progressive and open to the GDR, that is, as potential «political allies»³⁷. Adversaries – whose existence was inherent to

lischen Aufklärungszentrums, in *Revolution trifft Aufklärungsforschung: 1989/90 DDR-Erbe und die Gründung des hallischen Aufklärungszentrums*, ed. by D. Fulda, Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle 2021, p. 61-107.

²⁵ U. Ricken's *curriculum vitae*, 28 August 1951, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 22-23: «Es ist mir klar, dass wir gerade unsere sogenannten Geisteswissenschaften in besonders starkem Maße revolutionieren müssen, um sie voll einer fortschrittlichen Entwicklung dienen zu lassen».

²⁶ 10 June 1959, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 31. Unsurprisingly, SED members made up a good third of the *Stasi*'s unofficial collaborators. See J. Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990*, Berghahn Books, New York 2014, p. 87.

²⁷ Information about Ricken from the District Administration Leipzig, Dept. XV, 24 June 1959, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 40.

²⁸ See Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi*, cit., p. 79.

²⁹ See MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 33 (Report on Ricken's recruitment dated 19 June 1959) and p. 68 (MfS Information about Ricken from 21 August 1965).

³⁰ See e.g. the «travel itinerary», 28 July 1959, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 46-50.

³¹ See the «Einsatz- und Entwicklungskonzeption für den IMV «Roman», 22 June 1978, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 136-38.

³² See e.g. Ricken's «Bericht über die Studienreise nach Frankreich», 14 March 1978, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. II, p. 98, or the information he provided about a French language assistant, p. 163.

³³ See the report on the meeting, 23 December 1982, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. III, p. 68.

³⁴ See «Beurteilung über IMS «Roman», 13 December 1983, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 194. Chekists are the members of the first communist secret service in the Soviet Union and were regarded by the *Stasi* as role models for ideological determination and unhesitating severity.

³⁵ MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. I, p. 43 (24 June 1959, «aufklären») and p. 123: «Perspektivplan», 8 July 1976: «Aufklärung der Pläne und Absichten der französischen Botschaft im Bereich der Kulturpolitik sowie [...] Kontrolle der Aktivitäten und Kontakte zu den an der Uni tätigen französischen Staatsbürgern»; vol. II, p. 151 («Treffbericht» of the officer-in-charge): «Aufklärung der an die Universität Lille delegierten Mitarbeiterin der MLU – [name blacked out] – Arbeits-, Lebens- und Wohnbedingungen, Umgangskreis, Verhalten»; vol. II, p. 157-58, 164-65; vol. III, p. 39, 42, 113; vol. III, p. 271, one of the targets here is the future French cultural attaché. This terminology corresponds to the official language regulations of the MfS. See S. Suckut (ed.), *Das Wörterbuch der Staatssicherheit: Definitionen zur «politisch-operativen Arbeit»*, Aufbau, Berlin 1996², p. 60-61.

³⁶ U. Ricken, *Travel report* (Reisebericht), November 1979; Id., *Travel report* (Reisebericht), 1 March 1989, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. II, p. 184; vol. I, p. 287-291.

³⁷ MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. II, p. 290-292 (9 February 1989); vol. II, p. 184-85, 189 ([1979]); vol. III, p. 116-20 (autumn 1983), the quote is from p. 120. See also Ricken's report on the joint collabora-

an activist understanding of the Enlightenment – include not only the so-called imperialist enemies of peace and détente (on the political level)³⁸ but also emergent trends in the academic field, most probably postmodernism and poststructuralism, which came to be dubbed «irrational»³⁹. In promoting Enlightenment studies in cross-bloc cooperation, Ricken puts forth the argument that this would serve to counteract a conservative relapse in the international political climate.

6. IDEOLOGY VS. PLURALISM

How much activism can Enlightenment studies endure without sacrificing academic integrity? Placing oneself in the service of a dictatorship as a secret service agent surely crosses the line; it reduces Enlightenment activism to mere self-contradiction because it replaces emancipation with subordination and criticism with the affirmation of a presupposed truth. Ricken's case represents an extreme example, although he was by no means the only unofficial collaborator among the humanities' professors in the GDR. In itself, an activist approach to one's own research topic is not necessarily problematic. Yet research is never completely value-free. Rather, it is a matter of methodically controlling and self-critically reflecting on one's own unavoidable perspective. In addition, there are still good reasons today to continue seeing the Enlightenment as a mission worthy of civic and scholarly attention, not to say activism.

A problem arises when ideological constructions of history claim that their worldview is exclusively appropriate or legitimate. By 'ideology' I mean a 'closed' worldview that pervades 'everything', especially social theory, politics, philosophy and the very concept of history⁴⁰. Marxism in the GDR incorporated a state-approved understanding of the Enlightenment, and inevitably that ideological lens was brought to bear on Enlightenment studies. As described above, Enlightenment studies had to be stretched to close the circle twice, between the philosophy of history and historical empiri-

cism on the one hand, and between research and society on the other. Given their claim to a totality, ideologies contradict the premise of pluralism on which open societies are founded, neither allowing substantial criticism nor recognising other worldviews as equal in principle. As already indicated, that is not to say that research in countries with a pluralistic democracy is free from political bias. However, ideology in the sense just defined is generally not imposed by (state) authorities in democratic societies, and it runs counter to the principle of falsification, according to which theories must be falsifiable in order to be considered scientific.

It cannot be a question of completely excluding non-scientific motives and purposes from scholarship; this is neither practically promising nor epistemologically plausible. What seems to me to be important is that the principles of research for gaining, securing and disseminating knowledge – I am only mentioning the distinction between hypotheses and observations, the awareness that all questions and observations depend on the researcher's point of view, and the argumentative solicitation of the consent of others – are applied in such a way that research, whether activist-motivated or not, can be recognised by scholars with other political premisses.

tion with Lille dated 10 December 1981, vol. III, p. 46, and 4 March 1986, vol. III, p. 160. Ricken regularly emphasises that the political attitude of his contacts in the West is «progressive».

³⁸ Cf. the report, apparently written by Ricken, about his and the rector's trips to France, December 1986, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. III, p. 180-200, esp. p. 196. Against «US nuclear missiles»: report on a trip to West Germany, undated [autumn 1983], see vol. III, p. 116-20 (119).

³⁹ Cf. Ricken's report, 10 May 1988, MfS BV Halle Abt. II VIII 1244/75, vol. III, p. 227-36 (236). Ricken never specifies what he means by «irrational currents».

⁴⁰ See H. Arendt, *Totalitarianism: part three of The Origins of totalitarianism*, Harvest, New York 1968, p. 166-169.