

# **THE NEW ENLIGHTENMENT**

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A History Of The Next Ten Years

# An overview of the argument.

The Enlightenment has determined many of the institutions of the modern world.

And yet, many of these institutions now stand in need of reform as they are not suited to the current problems that we face.

What exactly was the Enlightenment?

How has the Enlightenment shaped our world?

In what respects does the Enlightenment fail us today?

What are the options available as we move forward into the future?



# What was the Enlightenment?

It is customary to date the Enlightenment from the Eighteenth Century, but it is apparent before and after that time.

The Enlightenment is a generic term used to describe the progress and consequences of ‘The Age of Reason’.

The Age of Reason developed as a counterbalance to the authority of the Church in the Middle Ages

At the heart of the Enlightenment is the belief that each person is a rational and autonomous being.

This means that authority needs to be based upon the consent of the individual.



# How did it shape our world?

Many of the institutional consequences of the Enlightenment took place in the Nineteenth Century – the ‘Victorian Age’.

The Enlightenment concept of the autonomous rational individual provided the theoretical basis for our democratic institutions.

The Enlightenment concept of the autonomous rational individual provided the basis for our legal institutions and concept of personal liberty.

The Enlightenment concept of the autonomous rational individual provided the justification for accessible education for all.

The Enlightenment concept of the autonomous rational individual provided the underpinning of our commercial and financial institutions.



# Where is the Enlightenment failing us?

Many of the Enlightenment institutions started to reveal their weaknesses in the Twentieth Century.

The democratic institutions displayed the capacity to generate monstrous governments, who did not respect the rights of minorities.

Personal liberties formed the basis for small groups to perpetrate diabolical acts upon communities.

Education has become a privilege open only to a minority of the human race.

The commercial and financial institutions of the Enlightenment have become vehicles for rent-seeking and privilege.



# What options do we have for the future?

As many of the Enlightenment institutions started to show their weaknesses in recent years, the case for institutional reform has gathered pace.

The recent global recession has led to many to call for the reform of the commercial and financial institutions of the Enlightenment.

These reforms are unlikely to take place without the reform of the educational institutions that feed them and the political institutions that sustain them.

The case for political reform has become the most pressing in recent years.

Opinion is divided between those who seek to reform the existing institutions, and those who seek to undertake more revolutionary political reform.



# The case for reform.

The Enlightenment institutions form an important part of the heritage of our civilization.

They have served us well in delivering over 300 years of rising prosperity, individual security, and personal comfort.

The institutional framework has changed over the years to meet changing circumstances and has shown its enduring nature.

This suggests that the process of change – the reform of the institutional framework – should continue.

In this respect, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Enlightenment (21CE) continues the work undertaken in the past and simply modernises the institutional framework.



# The case for revolution.

The Enlightenment is based upon the individual as a rational autonomous being.

Experience suggests that individuals are neither rational (they are also emotional) nor autonomous (they can also act in a herd like fashion).

The Enlightenment institutions have allowed for the development of rent-seeking elites in the realms of education, politics, and business.

If we are to achieve a fair society, then the institutions that give rise to rent-seeking need to be abolished.

In this respect, a new enlightenment is needed (E2.0) that will create the new institutions that break with the past and which will allow us to attain that fair society.





# A synthesis.

At present, the case for both reform and revolution is quite strong. Changes are being made to institutions that have a flavour of each.

The Enlightenment gave rise to many institutions that still serve us well. If we are too revolutionary, we may do away with the useful as well as the redundant.

The Enlightenment institutions have given rise to deeply rooted vested interests that are difficult to displace. If we rely upon the reform of the institutions, we may not change much at all.

We have yet to find a middle way that allows us to retain the best of the Enlightenment institutions whilst being sufficiently radical to do away with the harmful vested interests.



# Possible areas for change.

As the struggle between 21CE and E2.0 gathers pace, we are likely to see a number of key areas develop in the next ten years.

Our commitment to democratic governance may be called into question if people seek a technocratic solution.

Our commitment to individual personal liberty may be called into question as the safety of the community compromises personal freedoms.

Our commitment to unfettered commerce may be called into question if we are unable to control climate change.

The three key issues of our time – global commerce, global poverty, and global climate change – may act as the catalyst for a New Enlightenment.

