Immanuel Kant, 1963 *What is Enlightenment,* [*https://uvu.instructure.com/courses/519617/files/103419489/download?wrap=1*](https://uvu.instructure.com/courses/519617/files/103419489/download?wrap=1)

The Freedom to be Enlightened

What is enlightenment? Immanuel Kant a German philosopher wrote a paper on this very question answering it within his very first sentence “Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.”(Kant, 1963). The paper is not about what enlightenment is but about what obstructs it and how we can achieve it. At the time that Kant wrote his paper he believed that he was part of the age of enlightenment not an enlightened age. There is much debate over what this “enlightened age” looks like, so I will be going over what I believe the enlightened age to be and how/why we have already achieved what Kant’s society could not.

After reading Kant’s *What is Enlightenment,*  I have concluded that that there are two things that are required to be able to create an enlightened age. Access to education and resources that allow each man to acquire the knowledge to be able to think for himself. And protection under law that grants every man the right to express his views on such knowledge freely without repercussion.

Access to education and resources are necessary for enlightenment to thrive in any society. You cannot expect someone to create a garden without first providing the seeds. For someone to be able to think for themselves it takes information and ability to process information to form ideas, beliefs, and values. Without these a person is bound to take upon themselves the beliefs and values of those who do have access to this information and ability. Therefore an enlightened age can’t form because the uneducated are forced to rely upon the educated to think for them and to be enlightened one must be able to think for themselves. You must have access to education if society is to ever enter an enlightened age.

Just as important is the right under law to be able to express the knowledge that you gain from education. Knowledge is useless unless it is applied and the same is for free thinking. It doesn’t matter how great of views and beliefs you come up with if you are not allowed to express them. You can give someone all of the seeds in the world but if you ban them from the garden what use are the seeds? A suppressed society cannot be an enlightened society, enlightenment isn’t just the capability of free thinking but also the application of free thinking.

Now for the great question, do we live in an enlightened age or in an age of enlightenment? While Kant lived in an age of enlightenment, I believe that in the United States of America in 2020 we live in an enlightened age. The main reason that I believe this is the right granted to us under the first amendment in the constitution. The right to free speech, this allows the freedom of expression, it allows everyone to think for themselves without legal constraints. On top of that the public education system, does its job by providing the basic knowledge required to allow for the average man to be able to think for himself. America even goes a bit further, as a culture the USA tries to promote education to the point that it may even be considered damaging if not used properly. America both provides the legal right and the education and resources to allow for its society access to becoming enlightened if they so choose. And its that choice that really counts, its not as much about being enlightened as it is about the freedom to be enlightended.