COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

Did the Counter-Enlightenment, as a movement, exist?

ABSTRACT

The Enlightenment has been much researched, the counter-enlightenment, as a sort of weaker sibling, has not had the same attention. But is there really something to research? Did the counter-enlightenment, as a movement, even exist? That is the question I want to answer in my thesis.

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Chapter 1

An introduction to a contested topic

In this paragraph I will give an introduction to the subject matter I want to discuss. For my bachelorthesis I want to devote myself to a topic that is not very heavily researched[1]. Where the thinkers of the Enlightenment are very well known the thinkers that opposed them, belonging to the counter-enlightenment, are not. These are however, precisely the group of people I want to look at. In my bachelorthesis I want to find out if these people where just some sort of religious fanatics opposing any sort of change or very independent thinkers that had novel ideas that should be looked at. Or perhaps that they were both.

To do this however, I need to start at the beginning. The question I will first need to explore is, does the counter-enlightenment, as a movement, even exist? This is already not a generally accepted fact. Were a scholar like McMahon thinks it did exist (alongside and in the same timespan as the Enlightenment)[2] a scholar like Norton disagrees.

Norton, in his text with the very clear title *The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment*, claims the counter-enlightenment did not exist, or at least that it did not exist in the period in which McMahon situates it. Norton claims that Isaiah Berlin, who supposedly popularized the term has made grave mistakes is his research. The critique is mainly focused on Berlin misinterpreting sources and attributing supposed counter-enlightenment ideas to authors who did not posses such ideas.
According to Norton, Berlin shapes the view of the counter-enlightenment to explain 20th century totalitarianism. The counter-enlightenment with his focus on nationalism as opposed to universalism and romanticism as opposed to the rational enlightened ideals are conceived by Berlin as the ground in which totalitarianism could flourish. According to Norton however this view on the counter-enlightenment was later fabricated by totalitarian thinkers, who made history their own. The counter-enlightenment has not existed alongside the enlightenment but is a later social construct that was thought up by totalitarian thinkers.[3]

I think Nortons's text is useful in showing that is prudent to stay critical with regard to the subject matter we are going to be discussing. There is an inherent danger in letting ideologies influence the way in which we interpret history and we should be conscious of this. However, I do not think that Norton has effectively proven that the counter-enlightenment did not exist. While he might have proven that what Isaiah Berlin perceived as the counter-enlightenment may not have been it, he does not prove that there weren't people opposing the enlightenment and writing things about it.

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[1] McMahon, p. 8
[2] McMahon, p. 3-16
[3] Norton, p. 635-658.

Structure of the thesis:

In this paragraph I will explain the structure of the thesis and introduce my research questions. In this thesis, I will research whether the counter-enlightenment movement existed. My research question is: did the counter-enlightenment, as a movement, exist? To answer this question I will first look at the origin of the term (did it already exist in the time of the philosophes?). I will also give personal reasons why the movement should be defined.

I will then go on to sketch minimal characteristics for a movement. I think a movement should have members with certain ideas, that overlap, in a certain time period and that these ideas should have a certain novelty. My main question and sub questions will therefore be:

- Does the counter-enlightenment, as a movement, exist?
  - Are there members of the counter-enlightenment movement (are there philosophers with counter-enlightenment ideas)?
  - Do these counter-enlightenment philosophers have ideas that are similar?
  - Did the counter-enlightenment movement exist over a certain time period?
  - Did the counter-enlightenment thinkers have ideas that were in a sense novel?

After answering these questions I hope to be able to conclude whether the counter-enlightenment movement existed.

Why should the counter-enlightenment movement be defined?

In this paragraph I write about the origin of the name counter-enlightenment. We will see that it is a term that is created post-historically. I will also talk about pro's and con's for defining the counter-enlightenment as a movement.

In a recent article Eva Piirimäe, who is an expert on Herder, is skeptical about the usage of the term counter-enlightenment. She fears that the term may invoke false dividing lines and may disregard the complexity of a work of an author, when that author is placed in a movement.[4] I think there is always a danger of oversimplifying an author when you place him in a certain tradition. An author is unique and can never be fully explained by only talking about his tradition.

On the other hand almost everyone can name thinkers of the enlightenment movement and almost no one can name thinkers that opposed enlightenment thought, except of course within academic circles. While the placement in this movement doesn't fully explain the popularity of certain authors, I do think being placed in a movement gives less read authors a chance on a wider public. A movement is easier to understand than a collection of unrelated authors.

Enlightenment thinkers were aware they were part of the Enlightenment.[5] Counter-enlightenment thinkers were not aware of this. Google has a nice tool called Ngram in which you can research the use of a term over a certain time period. The difference in usage between

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[4] Piirimäe, p. 74-76

[5] An example of this is a text that Kant wrote called, *What is Enlightenment?*

enlightenment and counter-enlightenment is huge. Of the term counter-enlightenment, I get absolute no hits of usage at all until the 1930s. Of the enlightenment, I have hits from 1700 and onwards. Please also notice that the scales of the diagrams are quite different.
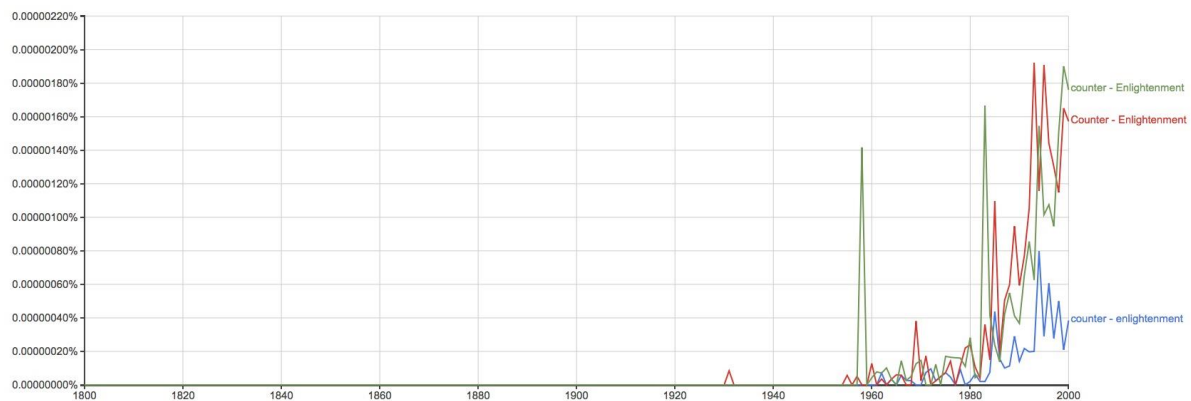
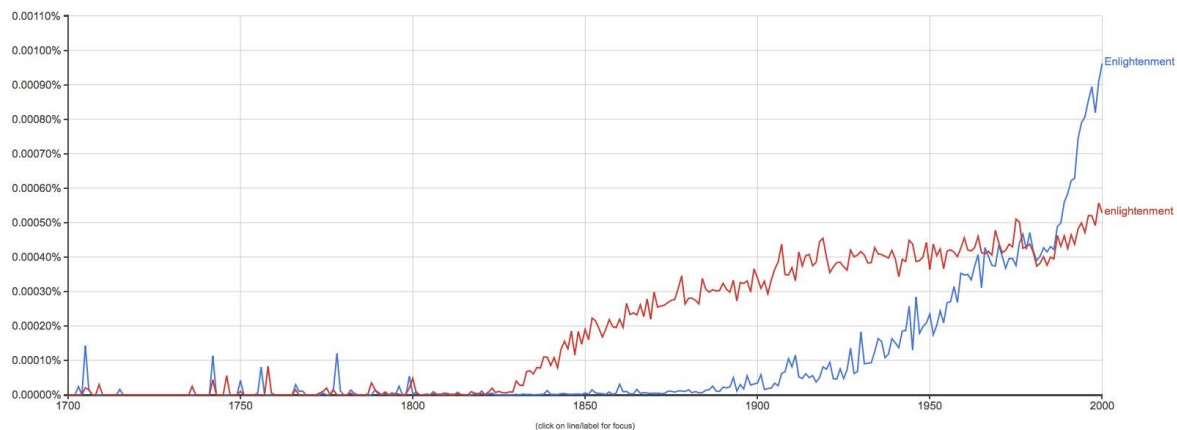*Ngram 1. In the Ngram you can see several uses of the term counter-enlightenment from 1800 and onward. I also made an Ngram for 1700 and onward but I didn't get any extra hits.*

Ngram 2. In the Ngram you can see uses of the term Enlightenment of 1700 and onward. The scales on the vertical x are a lot higher then in the previous Ngram.

Based on these Ngrams we can say that defining the counter-enlightenment is something that is done after the historical event. The real surge in the definition of this movement came in the 1950s and onward.

If the outcome of this research is that the counter-enlightenment movement did exist, I think it's important that we research and map this movement. By doing this we will be making a group of authors more accessible for a wider public. Of course there is the danger of simplifying an author, but I think forgetting an interesting author is worse. I would therefore like to continue the research into the movement.

How will I determine whether a philosophical movement like the counter-enlightenment exists?

In this thesis, I want to research if the counter-enlightenment, as a philosophical movement, exists. To do this I need to have at least some idea of what a philosophical movement is. I then need to apply that to what I can find out about the counter-enlightenment and find out

whether they match. In this paragraph, I will introduce the minimal criteria I will use to determine whether there was a counter-enlightenment movement.

It is always quite difficult to define something as vague as a philosophical movement, but for me a philosophical movement should have at least:

- a few members;
- who write (or speak) about certain themes;
- that have certain views or ideas that are similar;
- in a certain time period;
- that have views that are in a sense 'novel'.

A few members, who write (or speak) about certain themes:

In this thesis I will spend a considerable length to finding out who the members of this supposed movement were. I will look at several authors in het counter-enlightenment field to find out who they mark as members of this counter-enlightenment group. I will then close study some of these supposed members to find what their ideas were. I will work on the assumption that a movement is more likely to exist when it has more members from several different locations.

In this chapter I won't make a distinction between a casual member and someone who writes about a certain theme. If someone writes about themes that can be considered counter-enlightened, I will consider him a member.

That have certain views and ideas that are similar:

Being part of a movement does not mean that there can be absolutely no disagreement between the several members. On the contrary, I expect a lot of disagreement. I think disagreement is fruitful for the development of a movement. There should however be consensus about some themes throughout the ranks for there to be a movement. This consensus can be very mild. If I can find some family resemblances (after Wittgenstein[6]) between the thinkers I would be content to call this characteristic of a movement fulfilled.

In a certain time period:

I think a movement should have a certain coherency through time in order to exist. I would not care for defining a clear minimum or maximum. This should be looked at while taking the other characteristics in mind.

That have views that are in a sense novel:

I don't think a movement can be based on nothing but opposition. A movement is not a movement when it only says that another theory is faulty, how eloquently done that may be. My main reason for this is that it wouldn't be useful to study a movement of pure opposition, because it would imply that you would have to study the criticized movement first to understand what the movement of opposition is talking about. It's a lot more useful then to study the movement of opposition together with the movement it's criticizing.

If the movement has a very own worldview however, it is interesting to study it independently. A good example of this would be Marxism. It is in essence a movement of opposition against capitalism, but it has so many novel ideas that it can be studied as its own movement. You

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[6] Boukema, p. 1

would obviously still need some knowledge about capitalism, but you would not have to be completely versed in the work of Adam Smith, for example.

Balancing scales:
While I do think that the criteria I have mentioned so far need to be met, they also have an element of a balancing scale. Meeting the criteria does not mean you are directly a philosophical movement. This would depend on the weight the movement has in the several scales.

Three boys from Japan, China and the Netherlands writing about a new way of looking at videogames would theoretically pass my criteria. I wouldn't call them a philosophical movement however, because they don't bring any weight to the table. Defying a movement has a gradual element in it.

Chapter 2: membership

In this chapter, I will look at the ideas of prominent authors in the counter-enlightenment field. Who do they think belongs to the counter-enlightenment movement? I have selected two authors: Berlin and McMahon. After I find out who they nominate as members I will look into the ideas of these people more closely. I will try to study who these people were and what they thought and if their ideas can be called counter-enlightenment ideas.

The views of Isaiah Berlin:

In this paragraph I will look at the philosophers that Berlin thinks are part of the counter-enlightenment. These philosophers are called Vico, Herder and Hamann. I will try to find out if these were indeed counter-enlightenment thinkers. First I will explain why I'm using Berlin's ideas.

In my research about the counter-enlightenment the name of Berlin kept popping up. McMahon mentions him in his introduction (quite extensively, for a short introduction)[7] and Norton spends several pages of his text to establish Berlin's expertise (to later tear it down)[8]. Isaiah Berlin is supposedly a very prominent figure in the counter-enlightenment debate. I think it's useful to see what his views on this movement were.

The text of Berlin about the counter-enlightenment, *Against the Current*, is only 24 pages long. Of these 24 pages, he only uses about ten pages to explain what he views as the counter-enlightenment movement. Other pages he uses to explain the enlightenment and to establish a connection between romanticism and the counter-enlightenment.

For him the main characteristic of the enlightenment is the universal outlook. He thinks enlightenment thinkers all agree there should be one universal truth. The first counter-enlightenment thinker he introduces is Vico, who emphasizes plurality of cultures (this of course being opposed to the universal truth carried out by the enlightenment thinkers). According to Berlin, Vico is the first step in a big critique on the enlightenment. Berlin mentions that Vico was not very well read.

The next step in enlightenment critique is taken by Hamann who states that truth can never be general. Hamann is named first in a line of thinkers like Herder, Jacobi, Möser, Shaftesbury, Young and Burke. Berlin goes on to talk about Herder. He sees a ground for nationalism in Herders pluralistic views and starts drawing parallels with later time periods. Goethe and the Sturm und Drang movement pop up quite early in his essay and he makes a lot of references to it.[9]

Because of Berlin's prestige one would expect the text about the counter-enlightenment to be very strong and very precise in laying the foundations for the counter-enlightenment. Stepping away from this text I only have a vague sense of one of the characteristics of this movement, namely it being opposed to universalism, and a few names to go on. I think it's useful to look a bit further at the authors he mentioned, especially because of Norton's fierce critique.

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[7] McMahon, p. 8-11
[8] Norton, p. 637-639
[9] Berlin, p. 1-24

Vico:

Vico's major work is called *Science Nuova* (the new science). It was first intended as a big critique against all enlightenment philosophers but it ended up having a more positive message. Vico rejected the Cartesian way of finding the truth (only clear and distinct ideas are true) and said that the truth can only be found by creation. A concept we create can be true to us, but this truth doesn't reflect on the objective world (so, our creation of the counter-enlightenment can indeed be true as a concept). We create our own historical development; we create the truths we later find.[10]

For him historical truth can only be found in a certain historical period. History is not static. It is cyclical and moves from barbarism to heroism, to freedom, to disintegration. There is no universal human nature or truth. Assuming that universalism is one of the characteristics of the enlightenment, he did oppose this. In this sense, he can be thought of as a counter-enlightenment thinker.

Herder:

Herder has similar views to Vico. He was a relativist and thought that every human culture should be evaluated on its own terms. More than Vico, he emphasized the importance of language. For him there are linguistic groupings that have their own ideas, these ideas are expressed through language. Next to that, there are also national groupings. Herder emphasized how individual differences and cultures should be appreciated. This seems opposite to what Berlin suggests in his text. Herder was very much opposed to cultural assimilation.

Herder thought that the rationalist achievement of the enlightenment was a cultural achievement that was part of a European development but shouldn't necessarily be part of any other cultural development. Rationalism is not better than what other cultures are developing. Herder can be called a counter-enlightenment thinker because of his opposition to universalist enlightenment ideas. Herder describes the holy grail of enlightenment thinking, rationalism, as a cultural characteristic.[11]

Hamann:

Where Vico and Herder criticize but also construct a new vision of the world, Hamann mainly criticizes. Strangely Hamann takes a lot from Hume, a clearly enlightened thinker. Like Hume he thought that skepticism had destroyed all human beliefs. But where-as Hume thought this was a rational achievement, Hamann thought it showed that rationality was in fact bankrupt. This bankruptcy was created by separating rationality from faith. He thought that man could learn more from history than from science. Man should view himself in its religious context.[12]

Conclusion:

Berlin's text seems to be slightly one sided. He posits the enlightenment as being based on universalism. If that were the only characteristic however, it would not be very different from, say, Marxism and it clearly is. He then goes on to name authors that oppose this specific

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[10] Popkin, p. 502-504
[11] Popkin, p. 504-506
[12] Popkin, p. 506-508

characteristic. While these authors do seem to be counter-enlightenment thinkers we don't know yet how there pluralistic and relativistic views would fit into the counter-enlightenment movement. Frankly we don't have any idea of the movement at all.

To find out more about the counter-enlightenment we need to look for a more extensive, historical and more detailed picture of this time period. I think like McMahon succeeded in painting this picture of the movement. I will explain this in the next paragraph.

The views of Darrin M. McMahon:

In this paragraph I will look at the views of McMahon. McMahon wrote an extensive book about the counter-enlightenment, called: *Enemies of the Enlightenment*. In this book he talks about several thinkers who opposed the enlightenment. He mainly talks about not very well known thinkers. Instead of repeating McMahon's work, I will look at three authors that he defines as being part of the counter-enlightenment movement, but doesn't use in his book: De Maistre, Burke and De Bonald. First however, I will summarize the conclusions McMahon makes about the authors he did look into.

Where Berlin mostly focused on German figures as making up the counter-enlightenment, McMahon's book is very clearly focused on the French counter-enlightenment. The opponents of the Enlightenment in France can be found in the camp of the Ultra-Royalists. These people were not a very popular bunch and had an increasingly difficult position, partly because of the way their idealized kings acted. He describes a few main viewpoints of the movement, but does point out that there was a lot of discord about the precise way these points should be achieved or interpreted. These viewpoints are:

- The bond between the throne and the altar should be strong.
- The king should have absolute authority.
- There should be no freedom of expression and no religious tolerance.
- The past provides all knowledge about a society.
- There is an ideal society that is not present right now because of the interference of the philosophes (basically the enlightenment thinkers). To achieve this ideal situation, we should not return to the ancièn regime, but create a new society.

McMahon emphasizes that the counter-enlightenment movement was very much influenced by the enlightenment. The counter-enlightenment was a movement of opposition. Their way of arguing was based on diminishing enlightenment ideals, not necessarily on creating their own new ideas.[13]

McMahon, who believes the counter-enlightenment did exist, thinks that too much research into the counter-enlightenment has focused on the philosophers De Maistre, Burke and De Bonald. He thinks that his research has been too restricted and more names should be researched.[14] While I can applaud more research into this topic I can't say that I think that Maistre, Burke and De Bonald are already properly looked at. Frankly it's very difficult to find any information about them. They don't have entries about them in a book like Popkins, that should cover the history of philosophy. Only Burke has an entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and De Bonald's name isn't even mentioned on the entire website. Various

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[13] McMahon, p. 189-192
[14] McMahon, p. 9

search engines only supply me with a few articles and those aren't even completely devoted to the one thinker. Who were these people and what did they think?

De Maistre:

Joseph de Maistre was a defender of the monarchy and of the catholic church. These two powers should be closely allied. De Maistre was deeply hurt by the French Revolution and he lost his property and his position. This made him even more of an advocate of the anti-revolutionist movement.

Though De Maistre seems a very conservative thinker, Lebrun sees within him a certain ambivalence. While condemning the sciences for being responsible for the French Revolution, De Maistre also thinks the sciences should be more closely integrated with religion. He thought that science could play a role in demolishing other religions, but obviously not Catholicism, because it's the one true religion. The sciences could have their use but they should be controlled. A church should not be fearful of censorship. According to De Maistre, an actual truth would resurface even with controls (such as censorship) in place. Other dangerous thoughts could therefore be suppressed.

Nevertheless, De Maistre criticizes some contemporaries, like Locke and Bacon, with great fervor. De Maistre's main objection against (empiricist) science was that it seemed to ignore metaphysics. He wanted to defend metaphysics and religion.[15]

De Maistre laid a huge emphasis on the past. For him, history was the record of divine activity. Questions about human nature can't be answered a priori but must be found by looking at history.[16]

In this short summary of the thought of De Maistre I find it very interesting that a lot of the ideas that McMahon ascribes to counter-enlightenment thinkers can be found in the work of De Maistre. Like the thinkers McMahon researched, De Maistre thinks the bond between throne and altar should be strong, that the past is very important for creating insights and that censorship should be allowed. This is especially interesting because McMahon did not focus on the thoughts of De Maistre but on the thoughts of various other thinkers. De Maistre seems to be quite representative for the counter-enlightenment thought.

Burke:

Burke was a political conservatist thinker from Ireland. He opposed the French Revolution. For him, political progress should be achieved by reform: a slow process guided by God's providence. The French Revolution did quite the opposite. This was a fast innovation in which man let go of the idea of God and remade society in his own image.[17]

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* he laments the loss of chivalry. For him the illusions of the past that made society work adequately have been dissolved by the light of rationality. In his chapter called, *Loss of Compass*, he states that in the past there was a union between the spirit of a gentleman (nobility) and the spirit of religion (clergy). He thought this union was beneficiary to society and that is was very bad that this union was dissolved because of the French Revolution.[18]

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[15] Lebrun, p. 214-224, 228-229
[16] Lebrun, p. 226
[17] Ward Scheldon, p. 16-24
[18] Millican, p. 42-44

One of Burke's attacks on the philosophes considers the use of the social contract. He thought the idea of the social contract was historically incorrect and philosophically to blame for justifying the horrors of the French Revolution. For him society should be based on a constitution, with principles for both conservation and change.[19]

Burke is not as extreme a thinker as we have seen so far. While he opposed the French Revolution, he did not oppose the American Revolution.[20] He does seem to say that there should be a union between the clergy and the nobility. He also thinks the past is very important and that some kind of knowledge should be drawn from the past. He also opposes a key enlightenment ideal like the social contract. Burke seems to have a very specific view on how society should be constructed. While he refers to the past very much, he does seem to have very specific ideas about what is good about the past and what should be present in society.

De Bonald:
De Maistre and De Bonald have been described as intellectual twins, with De Maistre preaching the most passionate vision of danger when it comes to the philosophes.[21] Perhaps not a writer as passionately as De Maistre, De Bonald was a very fierce opponent of the French Revolution. For De Bonald there are immanent laws that should and do regulate society. Man can deviate from these natural laws, and has done that, in the French Revolution. This is wrong and it will not last, for if man does this it is going against his own nature.
By use of these natural laws, human society is always striving towards a perfect form. This perfect form is a union of religious and political society. This union creates civil society by means of mediation between two poles (mediation is a key word for De Bonald). This union could be found in the French monarchy. The French Revolution is very bad because revolutionists are going against natural laws and the perfect form of society.[22]

Further, De Bonald attacks individualism. For him, society should be community based. The Fall has contaminated individual free will and our essentially limited reason can't overcome this contamination. Therefore, individualism will never quite 'cut it'.[23] Man is a creature of society, it's shaped by society. Going a step further than just condemning individualism, he also condemns the social contract. Authority can never be bottom up; authority can only come from God.[24] Censorship is indispensable for a well-ordered society. What the individual writer writes should be suppressed in favor of the socially oriented writer.[25]

While the previous paragraphs give a general idea of De Bonald's ideas, they are a lot more complex. In his work, he paints a very interesting view of social groupings and the way society works. Jay Reedy even describes his ideas next to that of Foucault.[26]

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[19] Almeida, p. 211
[20] Spinner, p. 1
[21] Reedy *1, p. 173-189
[22] Koyré, p. 56-64
[23] Reedy *2, p. 49-51
[24] Koyré, p. 60
[25] Koyré, p. 71
[26] Reedy *2, p. 50

De Bonald seems to have a lot of novel ideas. He opposes the philosophes, but he goes beyond that. He builds his own (I would say ideal) system. De Bonald also seems to have a lot of the characteristics McMahon talks about. He thinks the union between state and altar is a very good idea, he does not like scattered authority, he supports censorship and he thinks we can achieve an ideal society.

Rousseau:
It might be surprising that McMahon writes quite a lot about Rousseau in his book about the counter-enlightenment. Rousseau was obviously one of the philosophes. He was beloved by revolutionary figure Robespierre and in 1794 he was even placed in the Pantheon. From this onward a lot of counter-enlightenment thinkers started to criticize Rousseau.[27] But before that, the situation was quite different. He was often set apart from other enlightenment thinkers and even quoted and used. His reception was quite big. William Everdell even calls him the founder of the counter-enlightenment.[28] Accepting this ambivalence in Rousseau, what was it that motivated the counter-enlightenment thinkers to adopt this philosophe? What appealed to them in his ideas?

McMahon gives us a general idea of what the counter-enlightenment thinkers found appealing in Rousseau. Rousseau argued that society has corrupted us all. He also turned himself against cold, rational reasoning and argued that the ways of the heart are also important. These ideas could easily be transformed into ammunition against the rational philosophes of which the anti-revolutionist claimed that they were corrupting society.[29]

Arthur Melzer also thinks that Rousseau is the founder of the counter-enlightenment. Though he thinks Rousseau's attack on civilization may have been very important for the movement, he thinks that Rousseau's views on religion were a lot more important. For him, Rousseau's vicious attack on religion later turned to a vicious attack on rationality (because it had the same alienating properties). Religion gets a new foundation with Rousseau.[30]

Whether Rousseau founded the counter-enlightenment movement or not, it's clear that he had a certain influence on it. I doubt we could say that Rousseau was part of the counter-enlightenment movement as he was part of the enlightenment movement. It is interesting to see that the movement shares certain ideas with him. I would characterize Rousseau more as an inspiration than as a member.

Counter-enlightenment thinkers that the spotlight of history failed to illuminate:
So far, I have talked about relatively big names in the counter-enlightenment. These are people that scholars have decided to write papers about. Other thinkers from the counter-enlightenment were not so fortunate. McMahon's book spotlights a lot of those people. The scope of this thesis doesn't allow that I go in to all their works. I do however want to stress that they were there and they were probably there in other countries than France as well. We

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[27] McMahon, p. 99
[28] McMahon, p. 35, 213 n. 66
[29] McMahon, p. 35, 51
[30] Melzer, p. 334-359

could be talking about hundreds of writers with novel but anti-enlightenment ideas that were overlooked because of the enlightenment's sweeping popularity.

Conclusion:
In the work of Darrin McMahon a lot of characteristics of counter-enlightenment thought can be found. He compiled these characteristics by looking at the work of various authors. In this paragraph, I have looked at the authors McMahon did not feature in his book: De Maistre, Burke an De Bonald. I have discovered that they possess a lot of ideas that McMahon calls characteristics of the counter-enlightenment. They do seem to be counter-enlightenment thinkers.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I tried to answer my first subquestion. My first sub question was: are there members of the counter-enlightenment movement (are there philosophers with counter-enlightenment ideas)?

It can be concluded that the thinkers we have talked about, Vico, Herder, Hamann, De Maistre, Burke and De Bonald, are counter-enlightenment thinkers. The movement has at least six members from different regions. It is very likely that these aren't the only members the movement has. While I don't think Rousseau can be seen as a member, the work of McMahon shows that there are more counter-enlightenment thinkers. The first characteristic, membership, has been fulfilled.

Chapter 3: similarity

In the previous chapter I have talked about the first characteristic of the counter-enlightenment movement. To exist, the counter-enlightenment movement should have members. I have found out that the movement indeed does have members. Now it is clear who the members are, it is time the look at the second sub question: did these philosophers have ideas that were similar? In this chapter I will look at different arguments and points that came up in the previous chapter and see if the philosophers have common ground.

By looking at the works of several authors from different countries (Ireland, France, Italy and Germany), I can't help but be quite struck by the apparent similarities in their works. While Herder and Vico and De Maistre and De Bonald are the most alike, there are similarities that can be found through all the different works.

In this chapter I want to look at several arguments or characteristics and see how many of the writers I talked about thought something similar about these subjects. I also want to talk about the points that McMahon pointed out as being characteristic of counter-enlightenment thought in France (in which he excluded De Maistre, De Bonald and Burke).

My main goal is to find out if the writers I have chosen are coherent enough to be able to be seen as representatives of a movement. I'm not looking for one big coherent worldview, but for several family resemblances, that can be found through the ranks. I will look at the different arguments introduced in the previous chapter and see whether the writers I have talked about agree or disagree on these arguments. I don't consider Rousseau a counter-enlightenment thinker, so I will not talk about his views.

Opposition to rationality, enlightenment and the French Revolution:
Every writer I have talked about so far seems to oppose at least some enlightenment ideas. Vico and Hamann seem to break the whole structure of the rational ideas down. Especially Hamann seems to be very skeptical about the worth of the philosophes. Herder thinks the philosophes are just part of an historical movement. He completely downplays their importance and the importance of rationality.
De Maistre, Burke and De Bonald don't only oppose certain key enlightenment ideas (mainly the social contract) but also oppose that what they see as the product of this enlightenment: the French Revolution. In McMahon's book, the thinkers also oppose the philosophes.

Opposition to universalism:
Berlin poses that the main characteristic of the counter-enlightenment is their relativistic or pluralistic worldview. While this view is present in Herder, Hamann and Vico it is not present in the work of the other thinkers. On the contrary. Burke, De Maistre, De Bonald and the thinkers in McMahon's book have very clear ideas about how society should be structured. There's nothing relativistic about their views. The way of the philosophes is bad, and their way is good.
An explanation for this difference might be the French Revolution. When you're confronted with a sudden change in government and eventually with very unpleasant circumstances (like De Maistre) it is very difficult to hold on to a relativist position. This might also explain why

Burke, who's a lot further away from the boiling point of the French Revolution, seems to be more moderate.

While Berlin poses that opposition to universalism is the main characteristic of the counter-enlightenment, it doesn't seem very widely shared. Actually, it only seems a characteristic shared by the authors that Berlin personally named. It seems that Berlin may have been too narrow in his research.

Bond between the throne and the altar:
Because Vico, Herder and Hamann are relativist thinkers it's difficult to say if they thought something particular about the bond between throne and altar. Hamann does lay a great emphasis on religion. From that we could determine that he wants religion to present in daily life, so perhaps also in the state.

Of De Maistre, Burke, De Bonald and the thinkers in McMahon's book we can be a lot more certain. They wanted a very strong bond between throne and altar. Burke may be a bit less extreme in this than his colleagues.

Absolute authority of the king:
De Maistre, De Bonald and the thinkers described by McMahon are in favor of an absolute monarchy. Burke seems to take an intermediate position and Hamann's main emphasis is on God. McMahon notes that in the period of the restoration (when Louis XVIII ascended the throne), the vision of absolute authority started to fall apart on the counter-enlightenment side. Louis XVIII disputed with the Ultra-Royalists quite a lot and therefore it became against their interest to support the absolute authority of the King.[31] This viewpoint thus may have changed over time.

Freedom of expression and religious tolerance:
Herder and Vico have a high appreciation for other cultures and other ways of thinking. From that I deduce that they would be opposed or at least not in favor of censorship. This is diametrically opposed to De Maistre and De Bonald who think censorship is very important for the structure of society, even indispensable.

The past and the place of history:
Almost every writer I have talked about so far thinks that history is very important. For Vico we create our own truth in history, Herder thinks our history makes our culture and determines who we are today. Hamann thinks history should be more important than science. De Maistre thought history was the record of divine activity. Burke thought the past gives us a sense of compass. De Bonald thought there were immanent laws that guide our society. By saying this, he puts the present society into its traditional history.

The achievement of an ideal society:
Vico imagined us as being caught in feedback loop from rise to fall. We are constantly moving towards a perfect society, but we will also lose it again. Hamann seems to think we should give ourselves to religion. De Maistre, Burke and De Bonald have a very clear idea about how society should be constructed. They're not just pointing towards the past and stating that it should be more like that, they're trying to explain how they think the world should be. Even

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[31] McMahon, p. 190

though their view on society differs, it's interesting that they all describe a certain ideal situation that we're heading for.

Comparisons and differences:

By looking at the previous paragraphs I can determine that the French authors have more in common with each other than with the authors from the other countries. One of the explanations for this could be the presence of the French Revolution. Such an event is bound to receive strong responses.

What the most counter-enlightenment writers do agree on is that the philosophes are up to no good. They also seem to think that the past is very important. The rest of the points are bit too heavily debated to draw a clear line. There is a lot of agreement, but not a lot of unanimous agreement. However I do not require this, I only require that there are certain family resemblances.

My second sub question was: Do these counter-enlightenment philosophers have ideas that are similar? If by similarity we accept that the counter-enlightenment thinkers share certain family resemblances, I think this criterion has been met. While there are great differences there are also a lot of agreements.

Chapter 4: time

In this short chapter I will try to find an answer to my third sub question: Did the counter-enlightenment movement exist over a certain time period? A movement needs to have a certain place in time. If an occurrence happens in too short a period it might lack relevance and growth, which are important to a movement. If it stretches out to long it could lose coherence and clearness.

McMahon situates the movement over the course of a century, he starts around 1750 and ends about 1850.[32] Berlin doesn't quite clearly define the parameters of the counter-enlightenment in time. For example, he uses the concept (not the word) in his book about Karl Marx, whose influence started around 1850.[33]

A period of a century is not too small to lose relevance and growth. It is also not too long. It is not impossible to create a sense of overview of this period.

Conclusion

My third sub question is: Did the counter-enlightenment movement exist over a certain time period? While there can be a debate about the precise scope in time of counter-enlightenment thought, it's clear that the thinkers did occupy a relatively long period of time. The fact that people wrote in this tradition over the course of a century signals its great importance.

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[32] McMahon, p. 21, 187
[33] Mali, p. 164

Chapter 5: novelty

After I looked at membership, coherence and time it is time to look at the last characteristic for the existence of a movement: a sense of novelty. In this chapter I'll look at thought in this period and find out if it was mostly made up of plain denial of the work of the philosophes, or if these thinkers created something new: a view on the world that was unique in itself. New (or novel) in this sense does not mean that the ideas are completely new and no one has ever thought of them, but that the writer doesn't merely criticize but also develops his own set of ideas.

In my chapter about membership I have already given a brief overview of the ideas of the several thinkers. In this chapter I want to emphasize the points I find new and relevant and slightly elaborate on those.

Vico:

Vico did not have a very big influence when he was alive, but he did have a big influence in the time that came after him. Nadler includes him in his book 'a companion to early modern philosophy', which is interesting in itself.

Marx wrote to Engels about Vico and he included a footnote about him in Das Kapital. In this footnote, Marx talks about Vico's view that history is made by man. He seems to think this is important for formulating a history of technology. Vico's view, that man makes his own truth in history (what is true and what is made converge), can certainly be called novel.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* are also influenced by Vico's work. He uses Vico's three ages (of gods, heroes and humans) and makes quips with his name. In the first age of Gods man sees the world as a pantheon of the Gods. They tremble in fear of these Gods. The main principles of society are religion, marriage and burial. After this age comes the age of heroes. In this age man is trying to understand himself through his mythology. The last age is the age of humans. In this age theory and reason take over. The imagination is very important, in all the three stages. It's the prime faculty from which society develops. By saying this, Vico makes quite a stab at Plato.

Verene states that Vico, by introducing the age of heroes, is the founder of the modern philosophy of mythology. He also says that Vico is the founder of the philosophy of history. [34] Vico's work seems full of relevant and new ideas.

Herder:

Herder doesn't only criticize enlightenment thinkers. He had a particular view about society. In this view on society, community and language play an important role. A human develops in a certain community. In this community, the human is shaped by linguistic, geographical and climatic factors. The development of every community is different but no community is better. Herder develops a cultural relativism.[35] I also see this as the development of a novel structure.

Hamann:

Hamann's work has not been without influence over the past years. He has influenced romantic thinkers, the critic Lichtenberg, Kierkegaard and other existentialist philosophers. While influence is not the same as novelty, influence does signal importance. For Hamann,

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[34] Nadler, 562-570
[35] Popkin, 504-506

knowledge cannot be attained trough reason and science, but through reason, experience and faith.[36] He replaces the values of the philosophes by different values which can be seen as novel.

McMahon's view:
For all its emphasis on the past, McMahon thinks the movement of the counter-enlightenment was a modern movement. Counter-enlightenment thinkers opposed the so called modern ideas of the enlightened thinkers. For McMahon this opposition in itself is inherently modern. They also felt that reason would have a corrosive effect on society. McMahon thinks this is also a quite modern way of thinking.[37] On the other hand, McMahon does point out that the movement of the counter-enlightenment was mostly a movement of opposition. For him, the Ultra-Royalists were very sharp in their critique, but less sharp in formulating what should replace the existing world order.[38]

De Maistre:
More than the other thinkers I have talked about, De Maistre seems to be a thinker of opposition. He attacked the philosophes very strongly, and defended the old world.[39] While strong in his opposition, he does not represent a new way of seeing the world.

Burke:
Burke seems to have very specific views on how society should be run. One of his more influential ideas is his idea of slow reform. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* he describes that reform should take place without destroying the place you want to reform. The useful parts should be kept. He thinks that reform, in this way, will be a lot slower than reform in which you demolish and rebuilt. For Burke, this is more of advantage than a disadvantage. The passage of time will bring out wisdom, this is very good for reform.[40]

De Bonald:
What is interesting about De Bonald is that he paints an entire structure that is quite new. In nature there are natural laws. These laws make sure society runs harmoniously and stable. Because humans have liberty, they can counter these laws from nature. By doing this, man will become sick. Furthermore, man will not be able to hold onto this deviation from nature very long. Popular sovereignty (man creates his own society) is an example of a deviation from nature. In nature, power is always exercised from above, not bottom up.
By obeying to these natural laws, society strives towards a certain form. Society is constituted by a synthesis or a mediation. Civil society results from a fusion of religious and political society. This mediation however, does not stop where society begins, it can be found everywhere. A society, that is constituted by mediation, is by definition a conservative society. This is a sign of perfection. Anything that furthers this perfectly constituted society is good, any reform that undermines it, is bad.[41] De Bonald uses the structure of society that he

[36] Popkin, 506-508
[37] McMahon, p. 197
[38] McMahon, p. 191
[39] Lebrun, p. 214 and Gerrard, p. 99-100
[40] Millican, p. 92-93
[41] Koyré, p. 58-67

creates, as a way of criticizing the French Revolution. It is however clear to see that there are many novel ideas in his view on how society should be.

Conclusion:

While McMahon thinks that the counter-enlightenment movement is made largely of thought focused on opposition (but that it is modern in its opposition), I come to a different conclusion. Several authors I discussed in my thesis have developed quite original ideas about the way society should be organized. Especially Vico, Burke and De Bonald thought of very interesting new structures. To view the counter-enlightenment thinkers as merely angry critical people is short-sighted. Studying these group of thinkers can lead to the discovery of an abundance of novel ideas.

My last sub question is: Did the counter-enlightenment thinkers have ideas that were in a sense novel? The answer is yes. A lot of the thinkers I have talked about have novel ideas.

Chapter 6: conclusion

In this thesis I have set out to research a diverse group of counter-enlightenment thinkers. My main goal was to find out if this group of thinkers can be called a movement. There did not seem to be consensus about that topic. To find out if they were indeed a movement I have defined certain characteristics I think a movement should minimally have. The weight the thinkers have in each category decides whether the group can indeed by called a movement.

The first category I defined was the existence of members who write about certain themes. In chapter 2 I have written about prominent thinkers in the field of the counter-enlightenment and have also written about people that they think are part of this movement. Isaiah Berlin talked about Vico, Herder and Hamann so I have considered them and found out that they do have ideas that are in opposition to what enlightenment thinkers thought.
McMahon wrote mainly about not very well known authors. I haven't repeated his effort (he did it very nicely). Instead I have looked to three authors that he claimed were part of the counter-enlightenment movement, but that he did not include in his book. These authors were De Maistre, Burke and De Bonald. These authors also had counter-enlightenment ideas. In chapter 2 I have found out that the movement indeed had members (and probably more than I have mentioned in my thesis) and that these members were from different countries in Europe. This is a strong indication that something like a counter-enlightenment movement did indeed exist.

In chapter 3 I wanted to find out if the members I had found in chapter 1 had enough similarities to be called a movement. I have compared the ideas of the various authors and found a lot of disagreement but also some similarities. I do not expect a movement to be one homogenous grouping, a heterogeneous grouping with some family resemblances should be enough to speak of a movement. I found enough similarities to conclude there are indeed family resemblances.

In a very short chapter 4 I have looked at the third criterion I posed: existence over time. The counter-enlightenment thinkers are very well rooted in time. Thinkers in the tradition have existed at least over the course of a century. This is a very strong indication of the existence of a movement.

I have looked at my final characteristic in chapter 5. There I have tried to find out if the counter-enlightenment thinkers were primarily thinkers of opposition or if they introduced new ways of looking at the world, instead of just opposing the way the philosophes looked at the world. Several authors I have discussed in this thesis have ideas that can rightly be called novel. I think this criterion is met.

All in all I think there is no other possible conclusion than that the counter-enlightenment movement did indeed exist. Not only does the movement fulfill all the criteria I have postulated, but it also fills them with quite some weight. This is a serious movement of thought with lots of members over a large period. It is time to acknowledge this movement.

Literature:

This is list of all the literature I have used in this thesis. In the footnotes, the author and the specific page is mentioned. In this list, you can find the full sources. The name in the footnote always refers to the name of the author or editor that is mentioned first below. The list is in alphabetical order and is put into APA.

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