

Reason, Liberty and Science. The Contribution of Freemasonry to the Enlightenment

Mădălina Calance*

Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration,
„Al.I.Cuza” University of Iași

Abstract

The theme of the article relies to the particular contribution of Freemasonry in the initiation and development of modernity, focusing on science, religion and politics. We know that, during the late Middle Ages, the European society was obedient to the „Church-Tradition-Monarchy” trinity; this status-quo collapsed due to the rational way of thinking; also the establishment of the universal human rights belongs to the Enlightenment, whose theses were supported mainly by Freemasons. Many researchers have proposed to show the extent to which Freemasonry helped to build the ideals of Enlightenment. The main conclusions that can be drawn, by analyzing their tracks, are: (1) All famous leaders of the Enlightenment had connections to Freemasonry; (2) The Enlightenment tenets overlap Freemasonry tenets, and, therefore they were supported and propagated by English, French, and American lodges; (3) Freemasonry progressively turned into a transnational vehicle for liberal thinking, disseminating the concepts of property and freedom in Europe and across the Atlantic.

Keywords: Freemasonry, Enlightenment, Science, Religion, Liberalism

Introduction

The Enlightenment was not just a moment in history; it transcends history, by igniting the light of knowledge, evermore. Our historical incursion shows that, behind the curtain, the entire movement stands, obviously, on the shoulders of some open-minded men, who flocked

* Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi

everywhere into the lodges of Freemasonry¹.

The Enlightenment has British roots, just like speculative masonry. Officially, Freemasonry lodges originate from English and Scottish guilds of masons in the Middle Age; in the 18th century the classical Masonic guilds appropriated speculative² mobiles³. Mackey states that:

Speculative Masonry (which is but another name for Freemasonry in its modern acceptation) may be briefly defined as the scientific application and the religious consecration of the rules and principles, the language, the implements and materials of operative Masonry to the veneration of God, the purification of the heart, and the inculcation of the dogmas of a religious philosophy (Mackey, 1882: 69).

Freemasonry instruments and ideas derive from ancient philosophy - Plato believed that geometry signifies “the knowledge of what endures forever and cannot be destroyed”; also on his famous school gates it was written: “Let *no one* destitute of *geometry* enter my doors”. Not only geometry, but all sciences, currents and doctrines have emerged from philosophical thinking. Nevertheless, philosophical allegations are not enough for an idea or a theory to succeed; usually, the strength of an idea depends on the number and force of its partisans. Without the proper support, the Newtonian principles would have been an unknown work today.

There was a time when science and the individual access to knowledge were limited by dogma, axiomatic inferences set by the Church and the disability of a non-literal society that strongly believed in magic. During the Dark Ages, all great ideas, scientifically proven, were often suppressed. A famous example of such a censoring practice is represented by the heliocentric theory of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642); the theory lacked support and, therefore, was labeled as heresy by its contemporaries, causing the arrest of its author.

However, the censorship of Galileo was not final. The boldness to know-“daring to know”, as formulated by Kant (1784: 481-494) - ceased to be penalized once the movement called “Enlightenment” gained momentum, in the eighteenth century. With the Enlightenment, science acquired supremacy, through the audacity of some skilled men, committed to the spread of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The students of human nature

The shift from a dogmatic society to a rational one could not be accomplished without the combined work of the academia, reading societies, cafes, salons and Masonic lodges- which constituted the meeting place for „learned and enlightened men” long before the Enlightenment. However, it is impossible not associate the scientific preoccupations of the Enlightenment with the pursuits of Freemasonry. Describing the qualifications of a true mason, Manly Hall writes that:

The true Mason must develop the powers of observation. He must seek eternally in all the manifestations of Nature for the things which he has lost because he failed to work for them. He must become a student of human nature and see in those around him the unfolding and varying expressions of one connected spiritual Intelligence...The Mason has sworn that every day he will extract from life its message for him and build it into the temple of his God. He seeks to learn the things which will make him of greater service in the Divine Plan, a better instrument in the hands of the Great Architect, who is laboring eternally to unfold life through the medium of living things (Hall, 1924:94).

The British Branch

The Masons are geopolitically divided in two different cultural groups: (1) the Anglo-Saxon Masonry, which promotes the belief in a Grand Architect of the Universe and His revealed will, and refuses any political or social commitment of its members (it is organized around the United Grand Lodge of England and the eight fundamental principles conceived in the Masonic Constitution); (2) the “liberal masonry”, which refuses any dogmatic assertion and encourages the involvement of its members in social and political matters- organized around the countries of Mediterranean Europe, especially in France (Saunier, 2002: 121-136).

In England, the patient and tenacious work of Freemasonry began much earlier than its formal reports. First and foremost, the force that changed the world’s view was represented by the enlightened philosophers. In this regard, Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is the first Mason pioneering the Enlightenment. Along with Descartes, Bacon can be considered the founder of modern philosophy.

Bacon was highly interested in epistemology and scientific research.

His works, “New Organon” and “New Atlantis” had a considerable impact on the European intellectual society. The “New Organon” advocates for the separation of religion and science, for empirical testing - as experience replace the supernatural, and for inductive reasoning - since induction annihilates syllogism. The “New Atlantis” presents an utopian society (Bensalem) in which research is conducted by baconian principles, in the space of a sanctuary called “Solomon’s House”- a Masonic symbol, one of the many which occur in his works. The whole Masonic system of symbolism is dependent for its construction on types and figures derived from the temple of Solomon (Mackey, 1882: chap. XII). Bacon was also zealous for ciphers and cryptograms- all seals, symbols or graphics from his writings are cryptic, revealing his close relationship to Freemasonry. In 1660 the Royal Society of London was founded, in order to improve all natural sciences, as a culmination and continuation of the baconian science work.

A further enlightened mind, John Locke (1632-1704), put the basis of empiricism, in his famous work: “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding”. The philosophical thinking of Locke begins with the human mind as a “*blank sheet*” (tabula rasa), on which nature prints its information and ideas; the mind further reflects human experiences and exudes new and complex ideas. The “Two Treatises on Government”, defending the ideals of the Glorious Revolution, emanate the famous ideas of liberty and property, which later inspired the American Revolution. Locke legitimized these modern institutions, allowing the individual rights to develop in the tradition of political liberalism. Insofar, as the Glorious Revolution is considered the starting point of political liberalism in the modern world, it is reasonable to link it to the “echoing thought” of John Locke- the ideologist of limited and constitutional monarchy. We believe that the English Revolution, like the following ones (French and American), had a strong Masonic imprint.

Very few of the author’s biographical documents are certifying his links to Freemasonry; there are several personal letters in his correspondence, through which he declares his interest in studying some old documents of the fraternity; he also expresses the wish to participate in a Masonic meeting, during a visit to London. We certainly know, however, that Locke was the inspiration for other great thinkers and

active masons, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau or François-Marie Arouet Voltaire; that Thomas Jefferson intensively studied Locke and was highly influenced by his liberal ideas- the Declaration of Independence certifies that "all men are created equal, [...] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"(The Declaration of Independence, 1776).

Since 1668, Locke, also a practicing alchemist, had been a member of the Royal Society, the first learned society for the study of science. The greatest scientist of all times, Isaac Newton (1643-1727) becomes the president of the Royal Society in 1704, after serving it for 30 years. During his lifetime, Newton met the philosopher John Locke, and found that they shared common interests and view-points, each recognizing in the other an intellectual peer; the dominant theme of their correspondence was religion (Fanning, 2009:178).

Newton's membership of The Royal Society and his preoccupations have led to the conclusion that he was a Mason himself; he had a dual personality, rational and mystical; he was interested in alchemy, chronology, numerology, biblical interpretation; he also studied, extensively, about Solomon's Temple- an important Masonic symbol, as we specified; on the other hand, he was active in rational domains, like physics and mathematics.

We know that one of the main 25 landmarks, enunciated in the Masonic Constitution, refers to the fact that any freemason affirms the existence of God as a freely definable Supreme Being, called the Great Architect of the Universe (Dobrescu, 1997: 140). Newton's "Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica" (1687) tries to decipher the laws of nature for a better understanding of God's wisdom. As a researcher of the Bible, Newton was also interested in the sacred geometry used in construction of the Temple of Solomon, so he drew a sketch to determine how the divine proportion combined different forms in order to complete the whole structure. Speaking of his passion, alchemy (whose ideas he tried to demystify), Newton stated that:

This philosophy is [...] to profit and to edification inducting the knowledge of God and, secondly, the way to find out true medicines in the creatures... so that the scope is to glorify God in his wonderful works, to teach a man

how to live well, and to be charitably affected helping our neighbors...This philosophy both speculative and active is not only to be found in the volume of nature but also in the sacred scriptures, as in Genesis, Job, Psalms, Isaiah and others. In the knowledge of this philosophy, God made Solomon the greatest philosopher of the world (Stokes, 2010: 94).

At a time when neither Oxford nor Cambridge would admit science courses, Masonic lodges invited Royal Society members in for lectures, many of which were accompanied by scientific demonstrations (Haywood, 1966: 1363). During the Enlightenment, scientists demythologized alchemy and turned it into a respectable discipline: chemistry. Chemistry further served the needs of modern industry, contributing to the progress of mankind. By allowing alchemy and science to merge, Freemasonry was the only platform that encouraged Newton and his contemporaries to advance on the path of knowledge.

Newton's infiltration into the Masonic circles is recorded in the Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, by emphasizing his closeness to Desaguliers (who was, at the time, the master builder of the new Grand Lodge system of Speculative Freemasonry) and his membership of the Royal Society - "so wholly Masonic that six or ten of its members were in the same Lodge at the same time"; the Society's club shared its rooms with the Lodge; furthermore, a few of the Lodges acted as extension centers for the Society at a time when it was not yet popularly recognized and was the butt of much newspaper ridicule, so that it was not of little importance for Royal Society members to be able to deliver scientific lectures (even on mechanics) to the Lodges (Albert and Mackey, 1914).

It is no wonder that the Royal Society was mostly composed of Freemasons- they were all open-minded men, ready to assimilate, filter and manipulate unconventional information, in order to generate science. The diversity of knowledge (Gnostic, Rosicrucian, cabalist or anti-church) was not a problem inside the fraternity, which had an universal and tolerant vocation. On the other hand, the British constitutional structure allowed the individual vote, exhibiting a new political culture and a new form of the civil society. The individuals who were eligible to vote were all gathering for lectures and debate in reading societies, clubs or lodges, encouraging these new forms of sociability.

Further we observe that the partnership between Masons, assuming their brotherly confidence and loyalty, was most likely the key to a wide range of products and ideas. For instance, similarly to the next discussed French branch, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, has been edited and printed by Freemasons. The Freemason Colin Macfarquhar and its founder printer, conceived it along with the engraver Andrew Bell, in order to embody the Enlightenment spirit in the British conscience and culture (Sheer, 2006: 108). They became really wealthy after selling the third edition. William Smellie, *Deacon of the Masons* and a member of the Royal Society, edited the first edition of the “Britannica”- for which he wrote fifteen scientific articles. He also supported William Aulds “The Free Masons Pocket Companion” (Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, 2011).

“Les philosophes”- The French Branch

At a time when political crisis and religious disputes tormented Great Britain, the partisans of the Stuarts, called the “Jacobites” worked for the restoration of the dynasty inside the Masonic “Invisible College”, which later became the above mentioned “Royal Society”, presided by Newton. After King James Stuart II was deprived of power, he found refuge at the court of King Louis XIV of France- this being the official moment when Freemasonry penetrated France. Louis XIV had a liberal personality and found in the Masonry a beneficial group for the society and for the progress of science. In 1666 he established the “Royal Academy of Sciences”- the counterpart of the English Society, in order to promote the experimental sciences and mathematics.

The connection between English and French Freemasonry became very strong. John Theophilus Desaguliers (1683-1744) - a Frenchman among the British, the inventor of the planetarium, was strictly connected to the Royal Society as an experimental philosophy researcher; he was also Newton’s secretary and friend; his major contribution to the Enlightenment lies in the dissemination of the Newtonian science and the support of religious tolerance. Desaguliers is known as one of the founders of modern Freemasonry, mainly for inspiring the first constitutional text of the brotherhood (Vigne and Littleton, 2001: 224).

François-Marie Arouet, known as Voltaire⁴ (1694–1778) is another key-character of the Enlightenment, a philosopher, a prolific writer and

also a Freemason. The time spent in England, during his exile, acquainted him with deism and religious tolerance, with the freedom of thought and empiricism. He read John Locke and Isaac Newton and admired the highly developed English thought and institutions. This is how he decided to introduce the English model into France, in order to achieve scientific and artistic progress.

It was Voltaire, for example, who first introduced French literate society to English institutions and ideas in his highly read *Lettres philosophiques*. He performed a similar service to Newton, offering his *Elements de la philosophie de Newton*, an interpretative distillation of the Englishman's *Natural philosophy*. If the scientific community drew directly from the *Principia mathematica*, the general enlightened public drew its ideas from Voltaire (Hans and Wilson, 2004).

The French Enlightenment was a literary boom and a struggle against religious and political absolutism. Voltaire always found himself in a philosophical battle, in his correspondence as well as in his works. "Écrasez l'Infâme!", meaning "Crush the infamous!" is his well-known motto, condemning superstition, religion – particularly Catholicism, injustice, arbitrariness, obscurantism, stupidity, or whatever may be considered contrary to humanity and reason. His first weapons for undermining the blinded beliefs and practices were the ridicule, satire, epigrams and jokes.

Voltaire was invited by Diderot and d'Alembert to join the adventure of the "Encyclopedia"- which was "not merely a compendium of progressive social and political thought, but of technological and scientific progress" (Hobsbawm, 1962: 20). "L' Encyclopédie", written between 1751 and 1772, sums up the collaborative effort of more than 125 European intellectuals, who challenged the certainties of the past centuries and defended knowledge based on reason and science. Jean d'Alembert wrote the introduction to the encyclopedia and many articles on mathematics and science. He took advantage of his social position and his connections to the literary world of letters for the moral and financial support of major exhibitions and collaboration of the best scholars and philosophers. This monumental work, which was sold in 30,000 copies across Europe, prepared, ideologically, the great upheavals

of the French Revolution.

The title page of the first edition of “L’ Encyclopédie” contains an illustration of Lucifer - the rebellious angel or the “Light-Bearer”, standing beside other Masonic symbols: the square and the compass. In The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, it is stated that:

Light is an important word in the Masonic system. It conveys a far more recondite meaning than it is believed to possess by the generality of readers...it contains within itself a far more abstruse allusion to the very essence of Speculative Freemasonry...Freemasons are emphatically called the Sons of Light, because they are, or at least are entitled to be, in possession of the true meaning of the symbol; while the profane or uninitiated who have not received this knowledge are, by a parity of expression, said to be in darkness.(Haywood and Mackey, 1914: 593-594).

We may assume that even the name of the era –“Enlightenment”, “Lumières”, “Aufklärung”, “просветление”- was inspired by the Masonic process of knowledge assimilation. Equally with the Encyclopedists, the Freemasons were “propagators of light”, supporters of the rationalist movement and science.

The Encyclopedia succeeded to arouse curiosity and to “vulgarize” knowledge in order to make it accessible to everyone. Diderot worked tirelessly on hundreds of articles that explained how the products are manufactured, in trade and industry. He went to workshops, bazaars, shops, wineries, farms and factories, to collect information from people who were active in the various fields, all illustrated in the book.

In the literary world, the monumental work, played a decisive role in the development of the “dictionary” genre, with the alphabetical order of ranking and the explanatory style, exercised by its contributors. For Voltaire, the encyclopedic experience was certainly an important moment, which prepared his future “Dictionnaire philosophique portatif”, written in the tone of a sparkling conversation about diverse and often subversive topics: the absurdity of religion, the political and social abuses, judicial errors of his time; he denounced torture, slavery and the death penalty. Voltaire believed that it is necessary to organize

social life according to the real terrestrial values, which are property and human freedom - the pillars of progress.

However, the disapproval of a cruel and arbitrary system ("Old Regime") was strongly expressed by many enlightened philosophers. Another Freemason, the baron Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu (1689-1775) recommended the limitation of the king's omnipotence according to the principle of the "separation of powers". He thought that an "intermediary"- a parliament, could represent the nation. His major work, called "The Spirit of Laws" submits the law to a scientific analysis. Montesquieu claims that the law represents human reason, which governs all people, while the political and civil laws are particular cases on which human reason can be applied. Laws are necessary relations, derived from the nature of things. For the author, laws are a condition to freedom - a relationship which is later tapped by the liberal economists. Montesquieu argued that social order should be based on the laws of nature and that freedom is a natural right.

Diderot favored the idea of tempered monarchy, governed by the "consent of the nation" as source of political authority. Concerning the social field, Diderot saw in the bourgeoisie a competent force in order to develop trade, the source of everyone's progress. Despite the fact that he subscribed to the ideals of the Enlightenment and had a wide system of relations in the circles of freemasons, Diderot, like his friend, D'Alembert, was never initiated. In fact, Voltaire, Diderot and other 18th century philosophers, found in Freemasonry an auxiliary for the wide propagation of their doctrines (Ferrer-Benimeli and Dougnac, 1988: 60-80).

The relationship between Freemasonry and "les Philosophes" is complex and insufficiently discussed in the academic field. A formal manifestation of this connection is given by the "Loge des Neuf Soeurs" from Paris, created in 1776 by Helvetius and Lalande; the lodge was committed to the culture of science, literature and arts, and was a spearhead of the Enlightenment and the Encyclopedists; a place of intellectual and philosophical effervescence, frequented by French and European elites. After Lalande, its Venerable was Benjamin Franklin, an amazing personality, who exercised his enlightened mind in the benefit of Colonial America.

The philosophy of the Enlightenment was further defended and adopted by the French Revolution (1789), with the aim of restoring man's natural rights, which were abrogated under the absolutist monarchy. The same year the "*Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*" listed the inalienable rights of: liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression - the pillars of liberal individualism. This general proclamation had a double significance: it surpassed the *old regime* and was forward-looking to promote the rationalist ideal and the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Revealing the involvement of Freemasonry within the critical events of 1789, the first written and graphic representation of the Declaration contains a powerful Masonic symbol, the "All Seeing Eye", integrated by a triangle, which is surrounded by rays. According to Mackey, the "All-Seeing Eye" is a symbol of God, manifested in his omnipresence. The triangle is an ancient symbol of Deity;

In the higher degrees of Masonry, the triangle is the most important of all symbols, and most generally assumes the name of the Delta [...] The Delta, or mystical triangle, is generally surrounded by a circle of rays, called a *glory*. When this glory is distinct from the figure, and surrounds it in the form of a circle it is then an emblem of God's eternal glory [...] the true Masonic idea of this glory is, that it symbolizes that Eternal Light of Wisdom which surrounds the Supreme Architect as with a sea of glory, and from him, as a common centre, emanates to the universe of his creation... (Mackey, 1882: Chap11).

The French Revolution was also directed by enthusiastic Freemasons, like Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, known as Marquis de La Fayette (1757- 1834), which was a French army officer, leader of the "Garde Nationale", during the bloody French Revolution, and one of the generals of the American Revolution. It was La Fayette who actually presented for the very first time the project for the "declaration of natural rights of man and citizen living in the society". On August 25, 1789, the Constituent Assembly, of which more than 300 members were Masons, finally adopted the immortal text of the human rights (de Poncins, 1975: 99-100). Thereby, the French Freemasonry has become the universal consciousness, reflecting the fundamental dimensions of

human progress: liberty, equality and fraternity.

The American Branch

The Masonic dimension of the founding of America is a very familiar issue today, with the one dollar bill wearing a wide range of marks, like the above-mentioned “All Seeing Eye of God”. The destiny of the United States was surely designed from the “mother-continent”. At a time when many European secret societies joined to become one (Freemasonry), Francis Bacon turned to be an architect of the future; he had a prophetic vision for the American colonies - firstly, his “New Atlantis” outlined an ideal plan, of Masonic inspiration, in order to organize the “New World”; secondly, through the Virginia Company, he found a way of infusing the British liberal philosophy into the colonies.

Further, the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers have spread into the American Colonies thanks to the early loges of Freemasons. Although people narrowly traveled on horsebacks and sailing ships, the apologists of the “enlightened movement” of the two continents were connected through an extensive knowledge network: the Masonic fraternity. Of course, the easiest method of correspondence was the post; but the efficiency of communication stood in the quality and the consistency of the epistles which transposed the reasoning and ideals of some great minds. The common goals and principles of the Masonic lodges have made possible an extensive assimilation of these ideals and their propagation.

There was a significant percentage of Masons among the United States founding fathers (like: George Washington, Paul Revere, Joseph Warren or John Hancock), who signed the “Declaration of Independence” or the Constitution. The structure of the United States Constitution was conceived according to the Masonic doctrine of fundamental laws and rights; the federalism created by the Constitution reproduces the organization of the Grand Lodge system of Masonic government- the subordinate lodges have control on local affairs under a set of by-laws of their own adoption, while the Grand Lodge manages the general affairs of the order (Carter, 1955: 119-154).

When Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) helped to draft the Declaration

of Independence, he was Past Grand Master of the Pennsylvania Freemasons. Franklin was a deep student of Masonic philosophy, and had been devoted to the study of its historic sources (Case, 1976: 7). His name remained in history for two reasons: his interest and work concerning electricity and his key-position in the achievement of the American independence. Franklin was also a supporter of free economy; during his stays in England he met many of the European leading intellectuals (including Voltaire or Adam Smith); he was intended as a negotiator on behalf of the thirteen American colonies, concerning the problem of taxation imposed by the King George III government. In 1773, in response to the unfair taxation system an unprecedented act appears: the “Boston Tea Party”, directed by members of Saint Andrew’s Lodge. This is regarded as the milestone of the American Revolution for Independence.

The Religious Issue

In 18th century Europe, all religions claimed their universality and exclusiveness. In addition, the state religion (Catholic or Protestant) was imposed on all residents of a country, resulting in the lack of tolerance for other religions. Religious exclusivity always raised barriers; all dogmas, rites, clerical interests, set differences between religions, and, therefore, between individuals. The main anti-religious trends of the Enlightenment - anti-clerical, atheist, tolerant and secular Gnosticism - activated on the same purpose: that all discriminatory differences should be eliminated.

However, we cannot study the religious allegations of the Enlightenment without referring to a precursor, René Descartes (1595-1650). Contrary to all criticism against the ontological argument, Descartes remains one of the most eminent scientists of the modern times- not for the correctness of his ideas but for the trend he initiated in the European thought: the individual withdrawing inside his consciousness, as a starting point in philosophy. Many internationally known philosophers, including Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant, are largely inspired by Descartes.

Descartes’ preoccupations were jointly related to science and metaphysics; he questioned the “Mystery of God ” and the essence of

things. The intellectual and spiritual approach of Descartes accompanied the initiation process for his “self-searching”, a Masonic quintessential concern. Although Descartes was more associated with Rosicrucian’s and less with the name of “Freemasonry”, his writings influenced the philosophy and teachings of Modern Freemasonry. Descartes’ philosophy was a crucial step for the scientific revolution of the 18th century, and laid the metaphysical background for the mechanical vision that dominated Newton’s philosophy.

Descartes tried to explain all phenomena in mechanical terms, except for the human soul. He believed that different laws set by God influenced motion, and that natural philosophy is aiming to discover and explore them. On the other hand, the metaphysics of Descartes draws on the theory of *Eternal Truths*, starting with doubt, which rejects any certainty. However, for the truth to be eternal, it is necessary not to doubt. The Cartesian doubt presents itself as a voluntary suspension of man’s own judgment that could be misleading, and which distracts the individual from any subjective influence. Descartes distinguished the mind from the body, in order to separate the spiritual needs - which rest under the guardianship of the church, and the freedom of knowledge - exercised by exploring the physical phenomena. Descartes paved the way to the scientific preoccupations of a new era, arguing for the compatibility of the Christian doctrine with research practices, in order to improve human existence.

Emphasizing the importance of the philosopher’s contribution to the Enlightenment, Michael Baigent states that Descartes

first embodied what was to become the prevailing mentality of the eighteenth. In France, however, the combined pressure of the Church and state had proved inimical, and the impetus of Cartesian thought had passed to England, where it manifested itself through men such as Locke, Boyle, Hume and Newton, as well as through such institutions as the Royal Society and Freemasonry itself. It was therefore to England that progressive-minded French-thinkers, such as Montesquieu and Voltaire, looked for new ideas. They and their countrymen were to prove particularly receptive to Freemasonry (Baigent, 1989: 185)

Further, John Locke was interested in analyzing the relation between faith, which reveals the truth, and reason, which demonstrates the truth. Locke argued that rational thinking should not bypass the genuine context of the divine revelation:

The bare testimony of divine revelation is the highest certainty... there is one sort of propositions that challenge the highest degree of our assent, upon bare testimony, whether the thing proposed agree or disagree with common experience, and the ordinary course of things, or no... This is called by a peculiar name, revelation, and our assent to it, faith, which as absolutely determines our minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering, as our knowledge itself; and we may as well doubt of our own being, as we can whether any revelation from God be true. So that faith is a settled and sure principle of assent and assurance, and leaves no manner of room for doubt or hesitation. Only we must be sure that it be a divine revelation, and that we understand it right: else we shall expose ourselves to all the extravagancy of enthusiasm, and all the error of wrong principles, if we have faith and assurance in what is not divine revelation (Locke, 1689: part XVI).

In England, a pronounced trend of debates was shaped, between the proponents of revealed religion and the followers of natural religion, considering the greater political and religious freedom. Above all, the new science of Newton took its credits for bringing arguments in favor of the supporters of natural religion, turning into a real “experimental theology”. In his “*Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*” Newton defended the thesis that the creation of the world, as well as its structure and becoming, can be explained by mechanical causes and that natural order is guaranteed by God. Newton’s argument had a twofold nature - it was *a posteriori*, concerning the finding of the natural laws; it was analogical, by aligning world order with the mind (the rational production of man).

However, the religious debate reveals not just the clash of two theoretical positions – the proponents of revealed religion (mystical) and those of natural religion (rationalist). In practice, the enlightened philosophers criticized all unwarranted dogmas that were contrary to reason. They denounced bigotry, rituals and especially the monopoly of religion in explaining the phenomena. They promoted religious

tolerance. They also stigmatized the power of the Church and reported the non-implementation of its sacred values (e.g. the endorsement of the war instead of promoting peace and brotherly love).

Voltaire had a deist vision; he saw salvation as an action for the Good and believed that God is at the beginning of everything - a watch requires a watchmaker just as the Universe requires a God. Voltaire's thinking, dead against all oppressive ideas, reinforced the idea that religion is neither a system nor a theory; therefore, he strongly condemned the crusades and disparaged a religion that imposes rituals, dogmas or priests (Voltaire, 1759).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a theist, thinking that the belief in God is written in the human heart and its conscience, which must be followed in order to distinguish Good from Evil. Therefore, he valued welfare and the morality of the heart. He exerted a great influence on the continental literature, promoting the modern concepts of nature and natural religion. At the opposite pole, Denis Diderot was an atheist; therefore, he was hostile to the version of revelation and providence. Determined by a strong materialism, he considered that metaphysics and morality are pure human inventions, dictated by man's own senses. Through some well-written encoded articles, his "Encyclopedia" became a weapon against the target of his criticism: religion. The historian Robert Darnton, known as the leading expert on 18th century France, remarked the efforts of the Encyclopedists which outdraw the absurdities of Christianity; he recorded that they

draped the pope in Japanese robes before mocking him in *Siako*; they disguised the Eucharist as an extravagant pagan ritual in *Ypaini*; they dressed up the Holy Spirit as a ridiculous bird in *Aigle* ; and they made the Incarnation look as silly as a superstition about a magic plant in *Agnus Scyrucus*. At the same time, they produced a parade of high-minded, law-abiding Hindus, Confucians, Hottentots, Stoics, Socinians, deists, and atheists, who usually seemed to get the better of the orthodox in arguments, although orthodoxy always triumphed in the end, thanks to non sequiturs or the intervention of ecclesiastical authorities... In this way, the Encyclopedists stimulated their readers to seek for the meaning between the lines and to listen for double-entendre. (Darnton, 1979: 8).

The founders of the anti-religious philosophical system are often linked to the Masonic thinking system. All Masons integrate into the core of an universal organization, based on knowledge, morality and freedom; therefore, they militate for religious tolerance:

The true Mason is not creed bound. He realizes with the divine illumination of his lodge, that as a Mason his religion must be Universal. Christ, Buddha or Mohammed. The name means little, for he recognizes only the light and not the bearer (Hall, 1924:94).

By promoting the Enlightenment, Freemasons hoped that a “natural religion” will replace the dogmatic forms of religion, bringing men from conflicting religious and socioeconomic backgrounds together into a common brotherhood of humanity (Wilson and Reill, 2004).

Freemasonry and Politics

The paradox of Freemasonry is that although it does not share political desiderates or convictions, it gathers many people from business and politics. Also, the philosophical ideas promoted by the fraternity were undoubtedly vehicles for a new system of thinking, playing a central role in the transformations of the 18th century. Thereby, the amount of efforts pointing the *status-quo* changing can be regarded as political. Abner Cohen notes that

the Freemasonic movement is officially opposed to the discussion of politics in the course of its meetings. There is certainly no conscious and deliberate use of Freemasonry in political maneuvering. But all this does not mean that the order is of no political significance (Cohen, 1976: 108).

Without any deliberate policy, the activities of its members become mechanisms for the dissemination of ideas and the transformation of thinking, so that the ground for great changes can be prepared.

Considering the fact that over time in Freemasonry integrated many other societies or ethnic groups, questions have arisen about its ability to organize interest groups. In the age of the Enlightenment, people who joined the fraternity shared common desires of achieving knowledge and laid the foundation of those universal sciences which lasted until our

days. Of course, the humanistic and rational thinking that engaged modernity found a major support in Freemasonry; the cohesion and vehemence of some important Freemasons shattered absolutism and censorship, but we cannot consider Freemasonry as a politically aimed machine. In other words, to share an ideal must not be confused with political interest.

The contemporary History Professor Margaret C. Jacob has made a significant contribution to the historical exposure of facts, concerning the link between the Enlightenment and Freemasonry; in a scientific manner, social history replaced some old theories on conspiracy, which were based on political considerations. Margaret Jacob shows that the Masonic Lodges had unconsciously political functions; they were the very first volunteer associations governed by a constitution (the Anderson Constitution, in 1729); they had annual elections in each lodge, which derived from the British post-revolutionary model, and were subsequently submitted to the other European lodges; they have become legislators or constitution authors. Jacob states that inside the Masonic lodges people competed for power; voted and chose their representatives; they found their identity in a different system, totally separated from the state and the church (Jacob, 1991: 475-495).

Furthermore, we know that the freedom of association is the result of a social virtue: sociability. Although we can identify many sociability forms which preceded the modern forms of socio-political expression, Freemasonry constitutes the area of the most intensive experiences: the birth of modern sciences, the birth of civil society, radical revolutions and regime changes; they have also constituted a class compromise between the commercially-minded aristocracy and the ascendant bourgeoisie, providing, through their transnational connections, an incentive for the future globalizing economic relations:

By entering the Masonic lodges, merchants and those otherwise involved in the long-distance money economy such as lawyers and accountants, realized the primordial alienation from the community which is the precondition for market relations, exploitation of wage labor, and abstract citizenship(Van der Pijl, 1995: 99).

Economics and Economic Liberalism

The fact that all physical sciences established a pattern concerning the natural laws that govern the environment and the life of the individual as well, prepared the background for social sciences. The efforts to understand the behavior of the individuals in production and consumption and the preoccupation for the achievement of the individual and national wealth have been translated in a whole new science: Economics.

Thereby, liberal Economics was developed during the Enlightenment, along with the classical masterpiece of Adam Smith, “Wealth of Nations”. We know that the Classical Economists provided the intellectual background for capitalism and market economies; the free economy concept derives from that time, from those circumstances, when the traders and merchants - the bourgeoisie - struggled to keep their business and to abolish the heavy burden, which was not imposed to the clergy or to the nobility.

We further want to emphasize the connection between liberalism and the features of Freemasonry. Socially, we can trace Freemasonry’s liberal convictions in the supporting work for religious and civil liberty. After disseminating the philosophical ideas which were the prerequisites for the revolution, Freemasonry assimilated the bourgeoisie and became the first form of association independent from the state. The average Mason was, therefore, a “voltairian bourgeois” (Koch, 2011) who struggled against authoritarian governments and the clerical power. At a time when political parties did not exist, Freemasonry - which declares itself an apolitical organization - becomes an unintentional platform for political aspirations (the coming Republic, the separation of church and state, etc.), all in the name of liberty.

Domestically, for its initiated members, Freemasonry endorses the way to break free from the grip of the individual’s usual mental and social environment - without imposing any prescriptions - allowing the researcher to find himself along with his inner-truth, which appears to correspond properly to the natural order of world. Also, the self-improvement and perfection of the Masons involves the study of the “Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences” (Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy), which are branches of

wisdom and life-learning fields. Along with the fact that freemasonry is a tolerant, universal and cosmopolite fraternity, all these aspects lead us to the assertion that the fraternity can be successfully associated with liberal thinking.

Returning to liberal Economics, we know that the lifeblood of classical liberalism comes from the “Physiocrats”, which represented the first school of economic thought and also a strong core of Freemasons. The word “physiocracy” combines two Greek ones: *phýsis*, e.g. nature and *krátos*, e.g. power. Therefore, in accordance with the trend set by Newton and the “followers” of the natural religion, the Physiocrats had a vision of a rational world, led by the power of nature, where everything is part of an interconnected system. The rational physiocrat principles followed the “Cartesian” perspective. They believed that a free natural system, based on natural order, uncorrupted by arbitrary man made laws, would eventually lead to the progress of mankind. In their philosophical system, we can easily identify the imprint of some important precursors like John Locke, who wrote on natural rights, natural law and property; René Descartes, who advocated for a rational order, or Isaac Newton, who provided a mechanical view of the natural world. We can see how these great ideas have lasted and thrived over time, we dare to say, due to the consistent contribution of Masonic enlightened minds.

Physiocracy began with a number of writers, who questioned the corrupted, mercantilist policies of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (the economic administrator of Louis XIV), advocating for *laissez faire* policies. Its founder, François Quesnay (1694-1774), was a member of the “Nine Sisters” Lodge in Paris. He collaborated on The French Encyclopedia, on the request of Diderot and D’Alambert, writing philosophical and economical articles. He also gave his personal services, as a doctor, to the mistress of Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour, who was Voltaire’s protector and had strong links to Freemasonry. One of Quesnay’s first protectors, the Count of Clermont, was a Grand Master of Freemasonry from 1743 to 1771- and we are sure that Quesnay’s protectors offered him a privileged source of contacts. On the other hand, many of his disciples were notorious freemasons, just as two of his grandsons (Théré et al., 2005: 1346). All important initiators or supporters of Physiocracy, like: Mirabeau, Du Pont, Gébeline or Turgot, had links to

Freemasonry.

In his “Economic Table”, Quesnay compared economy to the blood flow: the blood runs through the veins of every living being just as wealth flows into the veins of the state. Starting from such an analogy, he proposed the study of economy as a kind of physiology and concluded that the natural order is the providential order, giving an optimistic chance to free economy.

In the liberal spirit, Benjamin Franklin tried, at some point, to write a critical essay concerning the negative consequences of price control and trade restrictions; However, Economics achieves its status as a science after a decade, in 1776, with the publication of Adam Smith’s “Wealth of Nations”- a plea for economic liberalism. It is believed that Franklin traveled to Scotland with the aim of convincing Smith to conceive a treatise on colonial policy (Eliot, 1924: 67-96). “Wealth of Nations” had a strong impact on the economic way of thinking; it established a new order, among the American colonies and across Europe. The ideas proliferated by Adam Smith were not new or innovative; the author followed the tradition of the 18th century Enlightenment and got inspiration from many scientists or philosophers: he needed the Newtonian concept of “natural order” to sustain his own theory, “the invisible hand”; he needed Locke’s writings to lean on empiricism when observing human behavior and also to scientifically submit the law and the government to the laws of human nature; he needed Quesnay’s demand for the freedom of the grain trade, so he could set out the rules of the capitalist liberalism: free trade and free competition, that lead spontaneously to harmony. Freedom - a sanctified concept by the Freemasons and also by the Liberals is the most effective agent of economic development.

Conclusions

Searching the truth and achieving knowledge, in the favor of mental and material progress, were the benign forces of the Enlightenment, after a dark period of despotism, church oppression, ignorance and discrimination. During the Enlightenment, the speculative Masonic Lodges formed a privileged framework aiming to formalize and disseminate the rationalistic discourse of the philosophers. The common

point of all their discourses was acting and thinking in the name of reason and wisdom. Freemasons and the philosophers of the Enlightenment had a mutual relationship, by influencing each others' thinking and spirituality. The Royal Society of London and The French Academy of Sciences were hosting important Masonic personalities and encouraging free scientific proceedings, exercising a great influence on all the dimensions of human existence. Freemasons also provided the printing support for several monumental works that appeared during the Enlightenment.

We intended to point out the fact that there is no randomness in the fact that the Masonic pursuit for "enlightenment" coincides with this period of transition. The English model of freemasonry spread all over the world, finding resonance among the American Colonies and the French monarchy. The universal identity of Freemasonry was a vehicle for promoting the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. The Masonic constitution and its associated effects, such as the voting right and the freedom of speech created the premises for democracy. The non-discriminatory interface of the fraternity, the concern for the civil rights of the citizen and the campaign against a Church that was not, at that time, a sanctuary of the divine will, but a political institution centered on hatred and wealth accumulation, undoubtedly lead us to the conclusion that the organization is subject to liberal principles. "The rule of law" certainly induces social cooperation, from micro to macro scale, and Freemasonry is simply based on a set of shared values and norms for economic, cultural and political globalization that were able to unify humanity in its diversity, setting the prerequisites.

We dared to resurrect this topic, hoping to emphasize that a wide range of theories concerning the intentional and directed evolution of the great revolutions and the globalization process have a real scientific support in the social history of the 18th century. Freemasonry contributed to the process of globalization through its liberal values and international networking. The success of its activities is provided by several specific qualities: the elitist recruitment of its agents; the alignment to the rational way of thinking; universality, sociability and fraternity.

Our analysis reveals that: (1) All famous leaders of the Enlightenment had connections to Freemasonry; (2) The Enlightenment tenets overlap

Freemasonry tenets, and, therefore they were supported and propagated by English, French, and American lodges; (3) Freemasonry progressively turned into a transnational vehicle for liberal thinking, disseminating the concepts of property and freedom in Europe and across the Atlantic.

Also, we cannot ignore the striking coincidences that are claiming the appurtenance to the discussed organizational system and philosophy; very powerful personalities who have revolutionized the scientific and socio-political fields were Freemasons. Although there are many authors who tried to direct their writings to the ideas of intrigue, conspiracy, world domination plans or mystical grounds, we have chosen to expose a positive, unbiased version of the facts. Thereby we consider that Freemasonry offered and continues to offer to its members a particular spiritual and moral perspective, which encourages the freedom of conscience and progressive thinking.

Today, the organization still works as a social network, reuniting important personalities from all over the world and channeling its efforts to charity. By making an analogy to the cohesion of the freemasons and their fiercely allegiance to the liberal purposes during the Enlightenment, we can imagine the current strength of any of their deliberated actions. After all, the accomplishment of an ideal depends on the number and force of its partisans.

Acknowledgement

This paper was written with financial support from the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/134197 „Performanță și excelență în cercetarea doctorală și postdoctorală în domeniul științelor economice din România”, funded through Human Resources Development Operational Programme, in affiliation with „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi.

References

- Albert, C., Mackey M.D. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its kindred sciences*. 1914, available at: http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/mackeys_encyclopedia/n.htm (accessed March 2014)
- Baigent, M. *The Temple and the Lodge*. Arcade Publishing, New York, 1989.
- Carter, J.D. *Masonry in U.S History. Background, History and Influence to 1846*. WACO, The Comitee of Masonic Education and Service for The Grand

- Lodge of Texas, 1955, 119-154, available at: <http://web.mit.edu/dryfoo/Masonry/Essays/jdcarter.html> (accessed February 23 2014)
- Case, P.F. *The Great Seal of the United States. Its History, Symbolism and Message for the New Age*, Builders of the Advtum, California, 1976.
- Cohen, A. *Two-Dimensional Man. An essay on the anthropology of power and symbolism in complex society*. University of California Press, 1976.
- Darnton, R. *The Business of Enlightenment, A Publishing History of The Encyclopedie, 1775-1800*. The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1979.
- De Poncins, L. *La Franc-Maçonnerie d'après ses documents secrets* (1928). 5th edn., Diffusion de la Pensée française, Poitiers, 1975.
- Dobrescu, E.M. *Mapamond Francmasonic*. Nemira, București, 1997.
- Eliot, T.D. *The Relations between Adam Smith and Benjamin Franklin before 1776*. Political Science Quarterly Vol. 39, No.1, The Academy of Political Science, 1924.
- Fanning, P.A. *Isaac Newton and the Transmutation of Alchemy*. North Atlantic Books, California, 2009.
- Ferrer-Benimeli, J., Dougnac, F. *Diderot entre les jésuites et les francs-maçons. Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*. Vol.4, 1988, pp 60-80.
- Hall, M. *The Lost Keys of Masonry: The Legend of Hiram Abiff*, G. Raymond Brown Printing Company, 1924.
- Hobsbawm, E. *The Age of Revolution*. Vintage Books, New York, (1962) 1996.
- Jacob, M.C. *The Enlightenment Redefined: The Formation of Modern Civil Society*. Social Research, Vol 58, No. 2, 1991, pp. 475-495.
- Kant, I. *Was ist Aufklärung?* Berlinische Monatschrift Dezember-Heft, 1784, pp. 481-494.
- Koch, F. *La franc-maçonnerie est une religion de substitution. Interview with Roger Dachez*, L'Express, published on 27 april 2011, available at: http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/la-franc-maconnerie-est-une-religion-de-substitution_986544.html#J8BLIVW6YE13PbOc.99 (accessed January 23, 2014)
- Locke, J. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Chapter IV, part XVI, 1689, available at: <http://www.rbjones.com/rbjpub/philos/classics/locke/ctb4c16.htm#14> (accessed November 11 2013)
- Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, 1882. NuVision Publications, LLC, Sioux Falls, 2007.
- Mackey, A.G, Haywood, H.L. *The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*. Vol. I, The Masonic History Company, 1914.
- Saunier E. *Franc-maçonnerie et Révolution française : vers une nouvelle orientation historiographique*, Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique, No., 87, 2002,

pp. 121-136.

Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Old and Smelly? 2011, available at: http://nationalheritagemuseum.typepad.com/library_and_archives/william-smellie/ (accessed January 23, 2014)

Sher, R.B. *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America*. The University of Chicago Press, London, 2006.

Stokes, M. *Isaac Newton*. Thomas Nelson. Inc, Tennessee, 2010.

*** *The Declaration of Independence: A transcription, 1776*, The US Archives & Records Administration, available at: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html (accessed January 23, 2014)

Théré, C., Charles, L., Perrot, J. C. *Oeuvres économiques complètes et autres textes: Introduction des éditeurs, Textes philosophiques, Textes économiques antérieurs au tableau. Tableau économique, Philosophie rurale*. Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques, Paris, 2005.

Van der Pijl, K. *Transnational Classes and International Relations*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

Vigne, R., Littleton, C., *From Strangers to Citizens: The Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550-1750*, Sussex Academic Press, 2001.

Voltaire, F.M.A. *Candide*. (1759) 1998, Electronic Scholarly Publishing Project, available at: <http://www.esp.org/books/voltaire/candide.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2013).

Wilson, E.J., Reill, P.H. *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2004. *Modern World History Online*. Facts On File, Inc. <http://www.fofweb.com/History/MainPrintPage.asp?iPin=EEN803&DataType=WorldHistory&WinType=Free> (accessed November 16, 2013)

¹ The speculative Masonic Lodges are exclusively male private societies, that operate according to some strict rules, set by a constitution (Anderson); the Masonic activity is physical and also symbolical and abounds in customs, usages, rituals that are quite cryptical to the common man. Freemasonry declares itself a philanthropic society, based on solidarity and moral philosophy, mainly aimed at the global scale individual improvement of its members. Officially, a Freemason adheres to a particular philosophical system of thinking, which belongs to a philanthropic and mutual society, whose

members recognize each other by specific symbols. The secrets of the society can be truly known only through initiation and advancement in rank.

The peculiar character of Freemasonry is given by the initiation process and the pyramidal organization - there are 33 degrees or levels of knowledge; the lower ranks do not know what higher ranks do. The specific symbolism of Freemasonry includes: Solomon's Temple; the numbers (3, 7, 13, and 33); the square and the compass; the Sacred Book of the Law (which is the Bible, revealed by the will of divinity), and many others. The compass is a double symbol, meaning the sacred geometry and the Masonic God, called the "Great Architect of the Universe" -in a deistical conception of divinity.

² We find it necessary to clarify the term freemason, which signifies the mason released from the material work and concerned with speculative matters – in the philosophical meaning of the term. The transition from the operative to the speculative character of Freemasonry signifies that the operative art of masonry is symbolized in a new, speculative, science.

³ Documents of Masonic historiography show that speculative Freemasonry officially begins its work in London, year 1717, in the lodge entitled "The Grand Mother-Lodge of the World". With time, the Masonic lodges become widespread in Europe, Russia and over the Atlantic.

⁴ To the end of his life Voltaire joined „The Lodge of Nine Muses” in Paris, perhaps at the suggestion of his friend, Benjamin Franklin, who had the rank of Grand Master. For details concerning the act of initiation of Voltaire see: A. Germain, *Initiation de Voltaire dans la Loge des Neuf-Soeurs : précédée d'une notice sur Voltaire, les Neuf-Soeurs, les Trinosophes, accompagnée de notes explicatives sur les faits et les personnages*, Paris, 1874.

Biographical note

Calance Mădălina is a PhD Student in the field of Economics, at the Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration and also a member of the Economics Research Center of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, „Al.Ioan Cuza” University of Iași. The author is interested in Jewish history, secret societies and global conspiracy theories, pleading for the introduction of the conspiratorial reasoning in Economics.