

God's creation of the universe, the idea that mankind might one day master nature shocked many Church officials. Descartes's materialism seemed to suggest that humanity could live independently of God. Faith in the scientific method indeed had distinct philosophical consequences: "If natural Philosophy, in all its parts, by pursuing this method, shall at length be perfected," Newton reasoned, "the bounds of moral philosophy will also be enlarged." The English poet John Donne had already come to the same conclusion in 1612. "The new philosophy," he wrote prophetically, "calls all in doubt."

The men and women of science espoused the application of the scientific method to the study of nature and the universe. It was but a short step to subjecting society, government, and political thought to similar critical scrutiny. The English philosopher John Locke claimed that society was, as much as astronomy, a discipline subject to the rigors of the scientific method. Moreover, the Scientific Revolution would ultimately help call absolutism into doubt by influencing the philosophes, the thinkers and writers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The philosophes' belief in the intrinsic value of freedom and their assertion that people should be ruled by law, not rulers, would challenge the very foundations of absolutism.

ENLIGHTENED THOUGHT AND THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS



“What is the Enlightenment?” wrote the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. His response was “*Dare to know!* Have the courage to make use of your own understanding,” as exciting a challenge today as in the eighteenth century. During that period of contagious intellectual energy and enthusiastic quest for knowledge, the philosophes, the thinkers and writers of the Enlightenment, espoused intellectual freedom and the use of reason in the search for progress. Unlike most scientists of the preceding period, they wanted their ideas to reach the general reading public. Education therefore loomed large in this view of their mission. Their approach to education was not limited to formal schooling, but instead took in the development of the individual and the continued application of critical inquiry throughout one’s life.

The Enlightenment began in Paris but extended to much of Western Europe, including the German states, the Dutch Republic, Great Britain, and as far as North America. The works of the philosophes reached Poland and Russia. Orthodox Christian intellectuals carried the Enlightenment’s celebration of science and humanism into the Balkans. The philosophes’ writings helped confirm French as the language of high culture in eighteenth-century Europe. Indeed, it was reported from Potsdam that at the court of Frederick the Great of Prussia “the language least spoken is German.” But French was hardly the only language of philosophic discourse. In Italy, those influenced by the new thinking used the ideas of the philosophes to attack clerical and particularly papal influence in political life. In Britain, the philosopher David Hume and economist Adam Smith, father of free-market liberalism, represented the thought of the “Scottish Enlightenment.”

The Enlightenment can be roughly divided into three stages. The first covers the first half of the eighteenth century and most directly reflects the

influence of the Scientific Revolution; the second, the “high Enlightenment,” begins with the publication of *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) by Charles-Louis de Montesquieu and ends in 1778 with the deaths of François-Marie Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and the third, the late Enlightenment, influenced by Rousseau’s work, marks a shift from an emphasis on human reason to a greater preoccupation with the emotions and passions of mankind. This final stage also features new ideas relating the concept of freedom to the working of economies, best represented by the thought of Adam Smith. At this time, too, several monarchs applied the philosophes’ principle that rulers should work for the good of their subjects. But these experiments in “enlightened absolutism” were most noteworthy for rulers’ organizing their states more effectively, further enhancing their authority. This third period also brought the popular diffusion of the lesser works of would-be philosophes seeking to capitalize on an expanding literary market. These works, too, were influential in undermining respect for the authority of the monarchy of France and thus indirectly contributed to the French Revolution.

ENLIGHTENED IDEAS

The philosophes espoused views of nature, mankind, society, government, and the intrinsic value of freedom that challenged some of the most fundamental tenets Europeans had held for centuries. Slavery, for example, violated the principle of human freedom. The implications of Enlightenment thought were revolutionary, because the philosophes argued that progress had been constrained by social and political institutions that did not reflect humanity’s natural goodness and capacity for material and moral improvement. Although many philosophes saw no or little incompatibility between science and religion, they were skeptical of received truths passed down from generation to generation. Thus, they challenged the doctrinal authority of the established churches and launched a crusade for the secularization of political institutions.

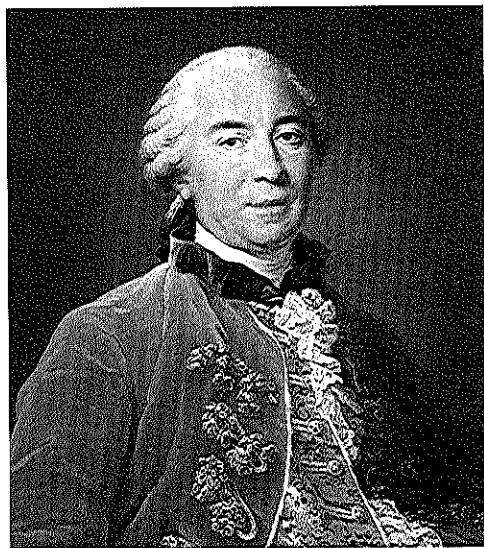
It is to the Enlightenment that we trace the origins of many of our modern political beliefs: the idea that people should be ruled by law, not rulers; the belief that a separation of powers ought to exist within government to prevent the accumulation of too much power in a few hands; the concept of popular sovereignty (legal authority should be wholly or at least partly based in the people, reflecting their interests, if not their consent); and the assumption that it is the responsibility of rulers to look after the welfare of the people. The consequences of such modern views of sovereignty, political rights, and the organization of states would be seen in the French Revolution and the era of liberalism in the nineteenth century.

Like all intellectual and cultural movements, the Enlightenment did not emerge spontaneously. Creating what David Hume (1711–1776) called “the science of man,” the philosophes reflected the influence of the Scientific Revolution, whose proponents had espoused the scientific method in the study of nature and the universe. Sir Isaac Newton, the brilliant English scientist and theoretician (see Chapter 8), emphasized that science—reason and experimentation—holds the key to understanding nature, and that mankind discovers knowledge not through religious teaching but through “observation, analysis, and experiment.”

Two thinkers linked the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment thought: John Locke and Georges-Louis Buffon. Locke (1632–1704) claimed that philosophy was, as much as astronomy, a discipline subject to the rigors of the scientific method and critical inquiry. The son of a landowner and a member of the British Royal Society, Locke maintained a strong interest in medicine. After returning from Holland, where he had gone into self-imposed exile during the political crisis swirling around the throne of King James II, Locke remained close to the government of King William and Queen Mary (see Chapter 6).

Locke believed that the scientific method could be applied to the study of society. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke postulated that each individual is a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, at birth. Believing that all knowledge is sensory, Locke denied the existence of

John Locke (*left*) and Georges-Louis Buffon (*right*), who both linked the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment thought.



inherited abilities and rejected the idea that humanity is stained by original sin, a view held by the Catholic Church. He anticipated that the discovery of more laws of nature would be the basis of secular laws on which society should be based. He was confident that humanity might thereby be able to improve social conditions.

Locke had asserted the dignity of the individual in contending that every person has the right to life, liberty, and property (though he excluded slaves in the Americas from such innate rights). He argued that monarchies were based on a social contract between rulers and the ruled. People had to relinquish some of their liberty in exchange for security. But, unlike Thomas Hobbes, who famously believed that individuals should surrender their rights to the absolute state of unlimited sovereignty in exchange for protection from the "state of nature," Locke insisted that mankind's liberty and rights stemmed from the laws of nature. He became a leading proponent of educational reform, freedom of the press, religious toleration, and the separation of political powers.

Locke's interest in the relationship between nature and the social order led him to consider issues of gender. The assumption that the king ruled his nation as a husband and father ruled his wife and children had been prominent in early modern political theory, only briefly challenged by a handful of radicals during the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. Locke argued against the contemporary vision of the state in which "all power on earth is either derived from or usurped from the fatherly power." He denied the appropriateness of the analogy between the family and the state as patriarchal institutions. Rejecting the contemporary view that Adam held supremacy over Eve, he viewed marriage, like government, to be organized by social contract. However, Locke went no further than that, and his espousal of equality within marriage remained only an ideal. In everyday life, he believed that women should defer to men. But Locke's analysis of the family as an institution nonetheless helped stimulate intellectual interest in the social role of women.

Georges-Louis Buffon (1707–1788) linked the Scientific Revolution to the Enlightenment. Buffon, whose initial presentation to the French Royal Academy of Science was a study of probability theory applied to gambling on hopscotch, became the curator of the Royal Gardens. Surrounded by monkeys and badgers in his laboratory, he carried out experiments, some of which worked, such as his study of the burning effect of the sun through glass, and some of which did not, including his study of the emotional life of birds. Buffon's experiments with cooling metals led him to build a large forge near his home in Burgundy.

The philosophes acknowledged their debt to the late-seventeenth-century proponents of the scientific method. Voltaire saluted Newton for having called on scientists and philosophers "to examine, weigh, calculate, and measure, but never conjecture." Hume insisted that all knowledge came from critical inquiry and scientific discovery and that the ability to reason

distinguished mankind from other animals. Many philosophes, reflecting the influence of the Scientific Revolution, considered religion, the origins of which they found not in reason but in faith and custom, to be a social phenomenon, like any other to be studied scientifically. Hume blasted away at the idea of religious truths revealed through the Bible.

The very universality of their principles led some of the philosophes to suggest that a sense of morality—of what is right and wrong—might vary across cultures because it emerged from the nature of mankind, not from religious teaching. Denis Diderot, influenced by Locke, argued that sensory stimulation—or in the case of people who are blind, sensory deprivation—shapes individual moral responses, and that moral principles for a blind man might be somewhat different from those of someone who could see. He described the people of distant Tahiti as forming a rational social order without the benefit of any ecclesiastical doctrine. Hume called for a “science of morals” to serve the interests of Christians.

The Republic of Ideas

The philosophes' calls for reform were sometimes subtle, sometimes boldly forceful. Yet they did not lead insurrections. Their pens and pencils were their only weapons as they sought to change the way people thought. They communicated their ideas in letters, unpublished manuscripts, books, pamphlets, brochures, and through writing novels, poetry, drama, literary and art criticism, and political philosophy.

The philosophes glorified the collegiality and interdependence of writers within the “republic of letters,” what the men and women of the Enlightenment sometimes called the informal international community of philosophes. By the mid-eighteenth century, Voltaire claimed with some exaggeration that the professional writer stood at the top of the social summit. He, Montesquieu, and Diderot accepted election to the prestigious French Royal Academy, revealing their ambivalence toward the monarchy that they attacked, however subtly, in their work. The most famous of the philosophes gained money as well as prestige, although Voltaire and Montesquieu were among the few who could support themselves by writing.

The philosophes may have shared the fundamental ideas of the Enlightenment, but significant differences existed among them. They came from different social classes, generations, and nations. And they often disagreed, like people in any republic, arguing in person, by letter, and in their published work. They could not agree, for example, whether the ideal state was an enlightened, benevolent monarchy, a monarchy balanced by a parliamentary body representing the nobility, or a kind of direct democracy. Their views on religion also varied. Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau were deists. Because scientific inquiry seemed to have demonstrated that the persistent intervention of God was unnecessary to keep the world in motion, they viewed God as a clockmaker who set the world in motion according to the



Voltaire presiding (with his arm raised) over a dinner gathering of philosophes, including Denis Diderot, who is sitting at the far left.

laws of nature and then left knowledge and human progress to the discovery and action of mankind. In contrast, Diderot became an atheist.

For all the variety and richness of the republic of letters, four philosophes dominated Enlightenment discourse with startling ideas about society, religion, and politics: Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau. Each is well worth considering separately.

Montesquieu

Montesquieu (Charles-Louis de Secondat; 1689–1755) inherited a feudal château near Bordeaux and a small income upon the death of his father. He studied law and later inherited from a wealthy relative more property and the title of baron de Montesquieu, as well as the presidency of the noble parlement, or provincial sovereign law court, seated at Bordeaux.

In 1721, after moving to Paris, Montesquieu published *Persian Letters*. In the form of reports sent home by two Persian visitors to Paris, his work detailed the political and social injustices of life in the West. By casting this critique of eighteenth-century France in the form of a travelogue, Montesquieu was able to dodge royal censorship. The work irritated ecclesiastics who resented its insinuation that the pope was a “magician.” As for the king of France, the Persians reported that he “is the most powerful of European potentates. He has no mines of gold like his neighbor, the king of Spain: but he is much wealthier than that prince, because his riches are

drawn from a more inexhaustible source, the vanity of his subjects. He has undertaken and carried on great wars, without any other supplies than those derived from the sale of titles of honors." But beneath the satire of the *Persian Letters*, Montesquieu was arguing the point that nature reveals a universal standard of justice that applies for all people in all places at all times, in Islamic Persia as in Christian France.

Montesquieu's ideas reflected the increased contact between Europeans and much of the rest of the world. Merchants, soldiers, missionaries, and colonists had followed the first European explorers to, among other places, the Americas and Asia. Published accounts of travel stirred the imagination of upper-class Europeans who were interested in societies and cultures that lay on the fringes of or beyond their continent. America and China, in particular, fascinated Europeans who had read about them. Yet in *Persian Letters*, Montesquieu manifested doubts about the quest for colonies: "empires were like the branches of a tree that sapped all the strength from the trunk." He also offered the first critical examination of the institution of slavery by a philosophe. He rejected slavery as an extension of despotism, concluding that "slavery is against natural law, by which all men are born free and independent" because "the liberty of each citizen is part of public liberty." Thus slavery compromised "the general good of men [and] that of particular societies."

The Spirit of Laws (1748) inaugurated the high Enlightenment. Montesquieu applied the principles of observation, experimentation, and analysis, which lie at the heart of scientific inquiry, to the social and political foundations of states. He described the relationship between climate, religion, and tradition, and the historical evolution of a nation's political life. Laws, he argued, are subject to critical inquiry and historical study because they develop over time. Historians, freeing themselves from the influence of the Church, could now study "general causes, whether moral or physical."

The British political system fascinated Montesquieu, who spent two years in England. He was impressed by the historical role of Parliament, a representative body unlike French parlements (law courts), despite the similarity of their names. The English Parliament seemed an "intermediate power" that had during the English Civil War prevented Britain from becoming either a monarchical despotism or a republic, which Montesquieu identified with chaos. His point was that each political system and legal tradition evolved differently. He feared that the French monarchy was showing signs of becoming despotic because it lacked the separation of powers found in England. Only constitutionalism could combine the guarantees for order (offered by monarchy) with those of freedom. Montesquieu believed that noble rights and municipal privileges, which had been eroded by royal absolutism in France, could stave off monarchical despotism. Montesquieu held that the sovereignty of the king came not from God, but from the people.

Voltaire

Brilliant, witty, and sarcastic, Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778) was the most widely read, cited, and lionized of the philosophes. He was the son of a notary who had enhanced his family's position through a favorable marriage. Voltaire's parents, who wanted him to be a lawyer, sent him to Paris to be educated by the Jesuits. Instead, the brash, ambitious young man made a name for himself as a dramatist and poet—though many of these early works are quite forgettable. Voltaire developed a pen as quick and cutting as a sword. Some of his early works were banned in France; everything he ever wrote was forbidden in Spain.

Like Montesquieu, Voltaire reflected the Anglophilia of the philosophes of the early and high Enlightenment. He extolled Britain, its commercial empire, relative religious toleration, and freedom of the press. Voltaire believed that the only representative body that might guarantee the natural rights of the king's subjects in France would be the equivalent of the British House of Commons. Whereas Montesquieu looked to the nobility to protect people from monarchical despotism, Voltaire counted on the enlightened monarchs of centralized states to protect their people against the self-interest of nobles.

Voltaire claimed that the political organization of each state was at least partially determined by its specific history and circumstances. As science should study the world of nature, so should the philosophe trace the separate development of nations. This line of reasoning convinced him that Montesquieu was wrong to think that the British political system could be successfully transplanted to France.

Voltaire reserved his most scathing attacks for the Church, an institution, like the parlements, which seemed to block the development of freedom in his own country. His motto was an impassioned cry against the teaching of the Church—"Écrasez l'infâme!" ("Crush the horrible thing!"). Of monks, he once said, "They sing, they eat, they digest." The pope and the Parlement of Paris both condemned his polemical *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764). His attacks were clever and devastating; for example, his pithy description of the Chinese as having "an admirable religion free from superstition and the rage to persecute" was read by virtually everyone as suggesting that in France the opposite was true. Voltaire believed that God created the universe and then let it operate according to scientific laws. He espoused a natural religion based upon reason.

Voltaire intended *Candide* (1759) to be an indictment of fanaticism and superstition. In the short tale, the cheerful optimist Candide bumbles from disaster to disaster. Here Voltaire confronts the seeming contradiction between the goodness of God and the evil in the world. He writes about the earthquake that ravaged Lisbon in 1755, killing thousands of people and destroying much of the Portuguese capital. If God is all good and omniscient, why, Voltaire reasoned, would He allow such an event to

occur? But Voltaire nonetheless believed that religion was beneficial because it offered people hope, and therefore made their lives more bearable. It also kept them in line: "If God did not exist, one would have to invent him. I want my attorney, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God, and I think that I shall then be robbed and cuckolded less often."

Voltaire's fame spread when he took up the cause of a man who seemed wrongly accused of murder. In 1761, Jean Calas, a Protestant from Toulouse, stood accused of killing his son, who had been found hanging in the family basement. The young Calas had intended to convert to Catholicism. Convicted by the Parlement of Toulouse, the father was tortured to death, though it seemed likely that his son had committed suicide. Several years later, the parlement reversed its earlier decision—too late, alas, for Jean Calas. But the Calas Affair helped put the philosophes' critique of religious intolerance into the limelight of public opinion.

Voltaire's energetic interest in the Calas Affair reflected his insistence that progress is somehow inevitable without human action. He concludes *Candide* with the famous, though seemingly ambiguous, advice that "one must cultivate one's own garden," as he did at his rural retreat. But Voltaire was counseling anything but a withdrawal into the sanctuary of introspection. He called for each person to follow the path of light and do battle with those institutions that seemed to stand in the way of humanity's potential. In 1764 he predicted, "Everything I see scatters the seeds of a revolution which will definitely come. . . . Enlightenment has gradually spread so widely that it will burst into full light at the first right opportunity, and then there will be a fine uproar. Lucky are the young, for they will see great things."

Diderot

Denis Diderot's monumental *Encyclopedia* best reflected the collaborative nature of the Enlightenment, as well as its wide influence. Diderot (1713–1784), the son of an artisan, was something of a jack-of-all-trades, a man of letters who wrote plays, art criticism, history, theology, and philosophy. Educated by the Jesuits (like Voltaire), he flirted with the idea of becoming a priest, and for a time supported himself by writing sermons for bishops. Unlike Montesquieu and Voltaire, Diderot underwent a rugged apprenticeship in the "republic of letters." He penned a pornographic novel to earn enough to indulge the fancies of his mistress. But he also questioned how, through centuries of male domination, women, despite their capacity for reproduction, had come to be considered inferior to men. Diderot claimed that laws that limited the rights of women were counter to nature.

The *Encyclopedia*, on which Diderot worked for twenty-five years and to which he contributed 5,000 articles, stands as the greatest monument of the Enlightenment. At the heart of the project lay the philosophes' insistence that knowledge is rational and that it follows the laws of nature. Social and political institutions should be submitted to standards of rationality. All

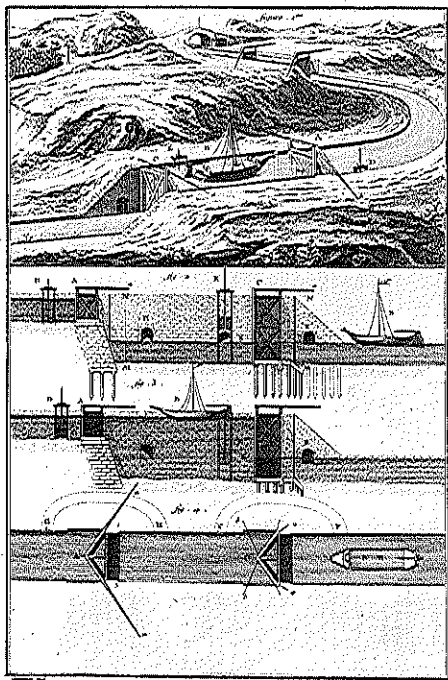
things, as Diderot put it, are equally subject to criticism. By elevating mankind to the center of human inquiry, the 140 authors of the *Encyclopédie*—including Rousseau, who penned 344 articles—sought to achieve Diderot's goal, “to change the general way of thinking,” as well as to bring glory to France.

Voltaire had set a goal for the Enlightenment itself: to educate the literate and intellectually curious of the social elite, and perhaps people farther down the social scale as well. The *Encyclopédie* at least partially fulfilled that goal. Published over a period of more than twenty years beginning in 1751, it consisted of 60,000 articles and 2,885 illustrations in 28 volumes. Subtitled “A Classified Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and

Trades,” this first such compilation in the West was a bold attempt to organize and classify all knowledge gathered from “over the face of the earth.” Its authors insisted that by learning more about the universe, men and women could improve the world. This marked a departure from the assumption that mankind's ability to penetrate the secrets of the universe was limited. Montesquieu contributed sections on artistic taste, Rousseau on music, Voltaire on literature, and Buffon on nature. Diderot gave particular credit to the everyday contributions of artisans by describing how and why ingeniously simple tools and machines could make tasks easier.

The *Encyclopédie* generated sufficient excitement that advance sales alone financed its publication. It earned its publishers a handsome profit. After the first edition, subsequent editions with less expensive paper and fewer illustrations became available at about a sixth of the original price. Lawyers, officials, and *rentiers* (people living from property income) were more likely to own a copy than merchants or manufacturers, who could afford the volumes but seemed less interested. What began as a luxury product ended up on the shelves of the “middling sort.”

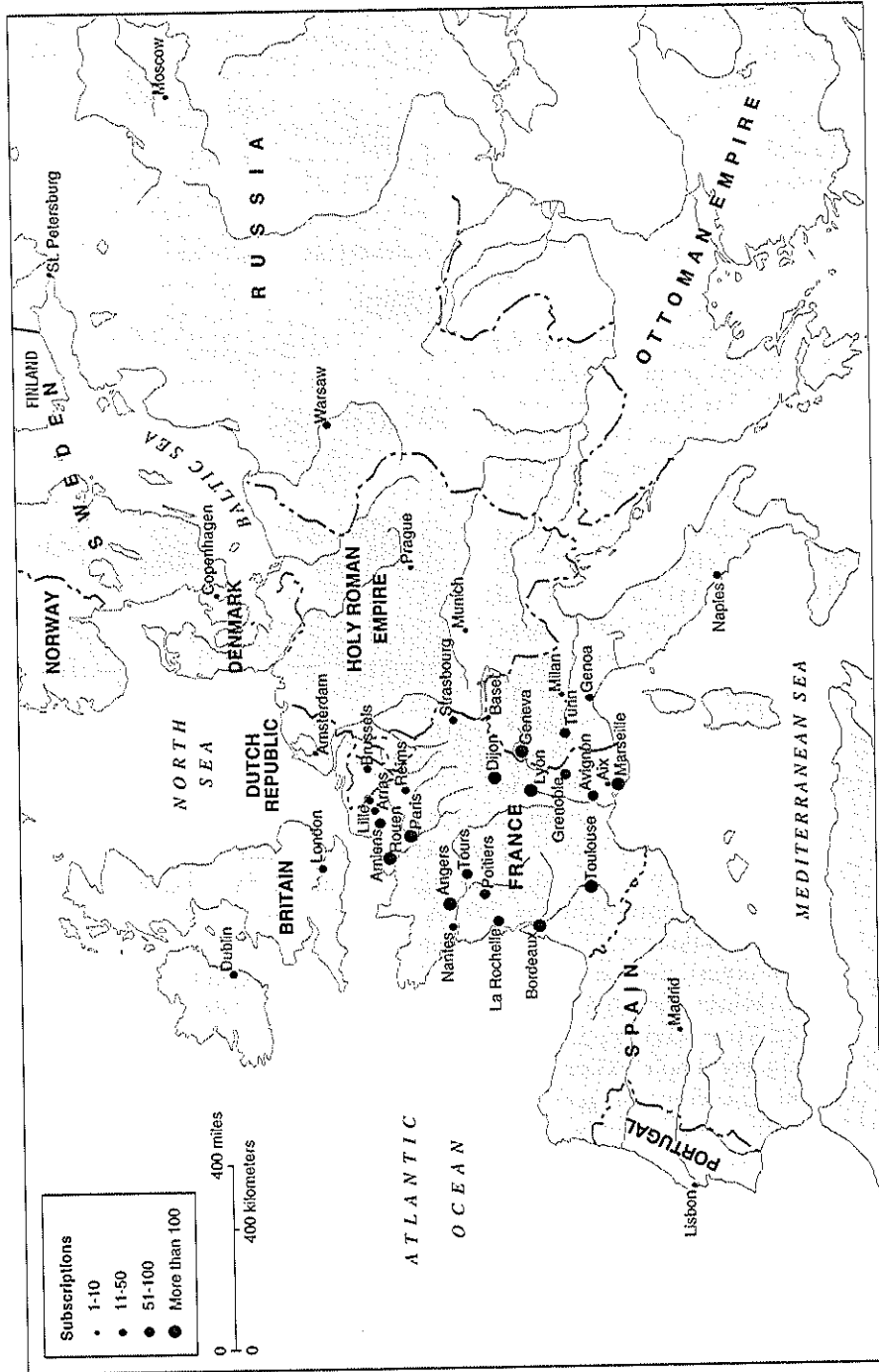
The philosophes wanted the *Encyclopédie* to carry the Enlightenment far beyond the borders of France. Although only about one in ten volumes



Hydraulique Canal de France

Depiction of an eighteenth-century canal with locks, from Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*.

MAP 9.1 DIFFUSION OF DIDEROT'S *ENCYCLOPEDIA* Subscriptions to Diderot's *Encyclopedia* throughout Europe.



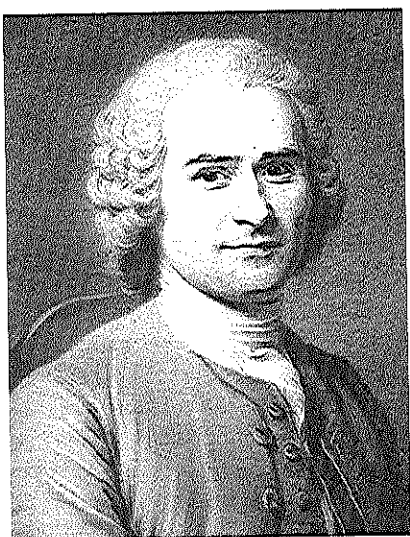
traveled beyond the country, its pattern of distribution in the 1770s and 1780s reflected the success of the enterprise (see Map 9.1). The *Encyclopedie*'s prospectus and booksellers' advertisements assured potential buyers that ownership would proclaim one's standing as a person of knowledge, a philosophe. In northern Germany and Scandinavia, customers were described as "sovereign princes" and "Swedish seigneurs." A few copies reached African settlements, including the Cape of Good Hope. Thomas Jefferson helped promote the *Encyclopedie* in America, finding several subscribers, among them Benjamin Franklin. King Louis XVI of France owned a copy. There was an Italian edition, despite the opposition of the Church. However, in Spain, Inquisition censorship frightened booksellers and buyers alike, and in Portugal only a few copies got by the police.

The *Encyclopedie* implicitly challenged monarchical authority. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote enthusiastically about representative government and even popular sovereignty, and came close to espousing a republic. After initially tolerating the project, French royal censors banned Volume 7 in 1757, after an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Louis XV. Diderot, whose first serious philosophical work had been burned by the public executioner, was briefly imprisoned. In the 1770s, the French state again tolerated the *Encyclopedie*, which it now treated more as a commodity than as an ideological threat to monarchy or Church. The small subsequent skirmishes fought over the volumes had more to do with rivalries between publishers, between those privileged with official favor and those without. In this way, Diderot's grand project symbolized the ongoing political struggles within the French monarchy itself.

Rousseau

The place of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) in the Enlightenment is far more ambiguous than that of Diderot and his *Encyclopedie*. Rousseau embraced human freedom, but more than any other of the philosophes, Rousseau idealized emotion, instinct, and spontaneity, which he believed to be, along with reason, essential parts of human nature.

The son of a Geneva watchmaker, Rousseau, a Protestant, went to Paris as a young man in the hope of becoming a composer. The arrogant, self-righteous Rousseau received an introduction into several aristocratic Parisian salons, informal upper-class gatherings at which ideas were discussed, where he became friendly with Diderot. In 1749, the Academy of Dijon (an academy in France was a regular gathering of people to discuss ideas, and, as we shall see below, a way that enlightenment thought spread) sponsored an essay contest on the question of whether the progress of science had strengthened or weakened morality. Rousseau's first-prize essay concluded that primitive or natural humanity had embodied the essential goodness of mankind and that for humanity to be happy, new social and political institutions would be necessary.



Portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Exiled by the Parlement of Paris because his writings offended monarchy and Church, Rousseau returned to Geneva. Following the condemnation of his writings there in the early 1770s, he abandoned his children in an orphanage—as his father had abandoned him—and set off to visit England. Rousseau remained a contentious loner, quarreling with other philosophes. He assumed that when his former friends disagreed with his ideas, they knew that he was right but simply refused to admit it. In his *Confessions* (the first volume of which appeared in 1782), he appealed to future generations to see how contemporary thinkers had misinterpreted or misrepresented him.

In *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), Rousseau argued that civilization had corrupted the natural goodness of man, which he called the “fundamental principle” of political thought. The intemperate quest for property had disrupted the harmony that had once characterized mankind in its primitive state by creating a hierarchy of wealth. Rousseau’s idealization of relatively primitive, uncomplicated, and, he thought, manageable social and political groupings led him to believe that a republic, such as his own Geneva, alone offered its citizens the possibility of freedom. As free people in primitive societies joined together for mutual protection, enlightened people could associate for their mutual development in a kind of direct democracy. However, Rousseau remained suspicious of representative government, believing that people might ultimately vote themselves into slavery by electing unworthy representatives. He remained vague on how people were to be organized and governed.

In *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau tried to resolve the question of how people could join together in society to find protection and justice and yet remain free individuals. Locke had described the relationship between a ruler and his people as a contractual one. Hobbes, in contrast, had argued that individuals could find refuge from the brutality of the state of nature only by surrendering their rights to an absolute ruler in exchange for safety. Rousseau imagined a social contract in which the individual surrenders his or her natural rights to the “general will” in order to find order and security. By “general will,” Rousseau meant the consensus of a community of citizens with equal political rights. Citizens would live in peace because they would be ruled by other citizens, not by dynastic rulers eager to expand their territorial holdings.

Although *The Social Contract* remained largely unknown until after the French Revolution of 1789, it offered an unparalleled critique of contemporary society. Rousseau summed up his thinking with the stirring assertion that "men are born free yet everywhere they are in chains." Whereas Voltaire and other philosophes hoped that rulers would become enlightened, Rousseau insisted that sovereignty comes not from kings or oligarchies, or even from God, but through the collective search for freedom.

Rousseau thus helped shape the final period of the Enlightenment, which anticipated nineteenth-century romanticism by giving emotion more free play. "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of nature, but everything degenerates in the hands of man," Rousseau's novel *Émile* (1762) began. It described what he considered to be the ideal natural, secular education, as the young *Émile* is gradually exposed by his tutor to nature during walks to explore brooks and mills. Rousseau intended such wonders to stimulate *Émile*'s emotions, which were to be developed before his sense of reason, "the one that develops last and with the greatest difficulty." *Émile*'s primitive virtue needed to be preserved against the vices of culture, but also developed as an end in itself so that he would become an autonomous individual. Rousseau assigned Sophie, *Émile*'s chosen "well-born" spouse, an education appropriate to what Rousseau considered a woman's lower status in life. Yet, even Rousseau's insistence on the capacity of women for intellectual development was ahead of its time. The novel became a literary sensation.

Voltaire ridiculed Rousseau's espousal of primitiveness as virtue: "I have received, Monsieur, your new book against the human race, and I thank you. No one has employed so much intelligence turning men into beasts. One starts wanting to walk on all fours after reading your book. However, in more than sixty years I have lost the habit."

THE DIFFUSION AND EXPANSION OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The groundwork for the Enlightenment lay not only in the realm of ideas, such as those of the Scientific Revolution and Locke, but also in gradual social changes that affected the climate of opinion. These changes, especially but not exclusively found in France, included challenges to and even the decline of organized religion in the eighteenth century, at least in some regions, and the emergence of a more broadly based culture.

Religious Enthusiasm and Skepticism

During the first half of the seventeenth century, the Catholic Reformation engendered a slow but steady religious revival in France, Spain, and the Habsburg domains. The founding of new religious orders and monasteries and the popularity of the cults and shrines of local saints reflected religious

intensity. The established churches still retained formidable authority and prestige.

The development late in the seventeenth century of Pietism among Protestants in the northern German states, emphasizing preaching and the study of the Bible, reflected, however, growing dissatisfaction with established religions and the existence of considerable religious creativity. Disaffected by abstract theological debates and by the Lutheran Church's hierarchical structure, Pietists wanted to reaffirm Protestant belief in the primacy of the individual conscience. Like English Puritans and French Jansenists (a dissident group within the Catholic Church), they called for a more austere religion. Pietists wanted a revival of piety and good works, and asked that laymen take an active role in religious life. Bible reading and small discussion groups replaced the more elaborate, formal services of the Lutherans, helping expand interest in the German language and culture among the upper classes. But by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Pietist influence had waned, reflecting not only the diffusion of Enlightenment thought but also the fact that Lutheranism remained the state religion in the northern German states, maintaining a hold on the universities.

In Britain, religious practice seems to have increased among all social classes during the seventeenth century. The Anglican Church of England was the Established Church, but Britain also had about half a million non-

Anglican Protestants, or Dissenters, at the end of the eighteenth century. Some middle-class Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Unitarians, Baptists, and Quakers sent their sons to private academies. Oxford and Cambridge Universities admitted only Anglicans. Anti-Catholicism remained endemic in England, where there were about 70,000 Catholics in 1770, most in the lower classes.

Although many Baptists, Congregationalists, and Quakers, among other Dissenters, had traditionally been laborers, no one religion held the allegiance of many ordinary people in England in the eighteenth century until the ministry of John Wesley (1703–1791). An Anglican trained in theology at the Univer-



John Wesley, who preached Methodist evangelism to the ordinary people of England.

sity of Oxford, the brooding Wesley began to believe that his mission was to infuse ordinary people—who seemed ignored by the Established Church—with religious enthusiasm.

Wesley never formally broke with the Anglican Church nor claimed to be setting up a new denomination. Yet that was the effect of his lifetime of preaching directly to ordinary people on grassy hills and in open fields and of writing religious tracts directed at ordinary Britons. Wesley attracted about 100,000 followers to Methodism. Stressing personal conversion, Methodism suggested that all people were equal in God's eyes. This offended upper-class Englishmen and -women, not the least because Methodists shouted out their beliefs and sometimes publicly confessed sins that the upper classes thought best left unnamed. A duchess explained that she hated the Methodists because "it is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth."

Methodist evangelism was both a dynamic and a stabilizing force in British society. There was little or nothing politically or socially radical about Wesley, as shown by his unwillingness to break formally with the Established Church. Far from preaching rebellion, Wesley encouraged work, self-discipline, and abstinence from dancing, drinking, and gambling.

The Anglican Church, in turn, began to seek more followers among the lower classes. It established the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and Anglican Sunday schools, which provided poor children with food and catechism. The evangelical Hannah More (1745–1833), the "bishop in petticoats," abandoned the material comforts of upper-class life for the challenges of bringing religion to the poor.

Despite all of the evangelistic efforts, by the middle of the eighteenth century religion seemed to play a significantly smaller role in the lives of people of all classes, particularly in regions with expanding economies and relatively high literacy rates. The numbers of men and women entering the clergy in France declined, and male and female monastic orders lost a third of their members between 1770 and 1790 alone. Fewer wills requested that Masses be said for the deceased or for souls in Purgatory. A Venetian theologian at mid-century claimed that the people of his state had become "dechristianized." In France, popular dislike of the exemption of the clergy from taxes increased, although the Church still provided the monarchy a sizable yearly contribution from its great wealth. Thus, the philosophes who challenged the role of the established churches in public life were addressing many readers who had lost interest in organized religion.

Expansion of the Cultural Base

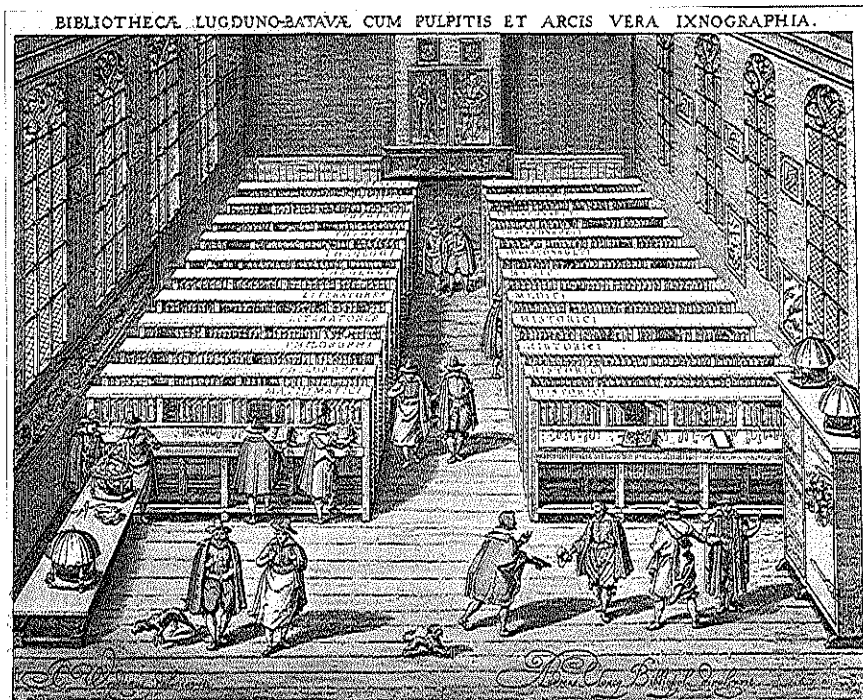
The expanding influence of the middle classes in England and northwestern Europe also began slowly to transform cultural life, expanding interest in literature, music, and the arts. The increasing number of literary associations reflected this change. A rise in literacy expanded the size of the

potential audience of the philosophes. By the end of the century, perhaps half of the men in England, France, the Netherlands, and the German states could read. A smaller proportion of women—between a third to a half of the female population of these countries—was literate. The rate was considerably lower in southern Europe, and relatively few people could read in Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Balkans. Opportunities for women, even those from noble families, to obtain more than a minimal education remained quite rare, although several German states began schools for girls. Even Marie Antoinette, queen of France and one of the wealthiest people in the world, made frequent grammatical and spelling errors.

Publishers fed the growing appetites of readers eager to know what events were taking place in their own country and abroad. Newspapers published one or two times a week summarized events transpiring in other countries. The number of English periodicals increased sixfold between 1700 and 1780. In the German states, the number of books and magazines published grew by three times during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Novels gained in popularity at the expense of books on theology and popular piety. Sentimental novels presented syrupy stories of domestic life and tender love. English female novelists gave women an unprecedented public voice in Britain, presenting their heroines as affectionate companions to their husbands and good mothers. Diderot and the German dramatist and critic Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781) called for the theater to portray the lives and passions of ordinary people, instead of only kings and queens, princes and princesses. However, traditional literature, such as religious tracts, popular almanacs, and folktales, remained the most widely read literature.

The Enlightenment had a direct influence on the growing popularity of history. Reflecting their interest in understanding human experience, the philosophes helped create history as a modern discipline. Since the classical Greeks, there had been relatively little interest in history in Europe. Church fathers espoused the primacy of theology and viewed the world as little more than a test to prepare Christians for the afterlife. But now all human experience, including non-Western cultures, emerged as suitable for historical inquiry. Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) was inspired to undertake his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published over a period of twelve years beginning in 1776) by visiting the coliseum in Rome. Natural science, too, developed a following.

The number of lending libraries, as well as reading circles or clubs, some organized by resourceful booksellers, increased. In Paris, London, Milan, Berlin, and other large cities, lending libraries rented books for as short a period as an hour. Small private libraries became more common. Reading, which heretofore had largely been a group activity in which a literate person read to others—in the same way that storytellers spun their yarns—became more of a private undertaking.



The library of the University of Leyden in the Netherlands, 1610.

While some of the most significant works of the Enlightenment were virtually unknown outside the republic of letters, others became the best-sellers of the age. Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws* went through twenty-two printings—approximately 35,000 copies—in the first eighteen months after publication in 1748. Buffon's thirty-volume study, *The System of Nature* (1749–1804)—despite its bulk—also enjoyed prodigious success. Voltaire's *Candide* was reprinted eight times the year of its publication in 1759. Abbé Guillaume Raynal's *The Philosophical and Political History of European Colonies and Commerce in the Two Indies* (1770) was reprinted seventy times to supply an eager market. It described the colonization of the New World, Asia, and Africa, including the development of the slave trade, which Raynal denounced in no uncertain terms.

The Arts

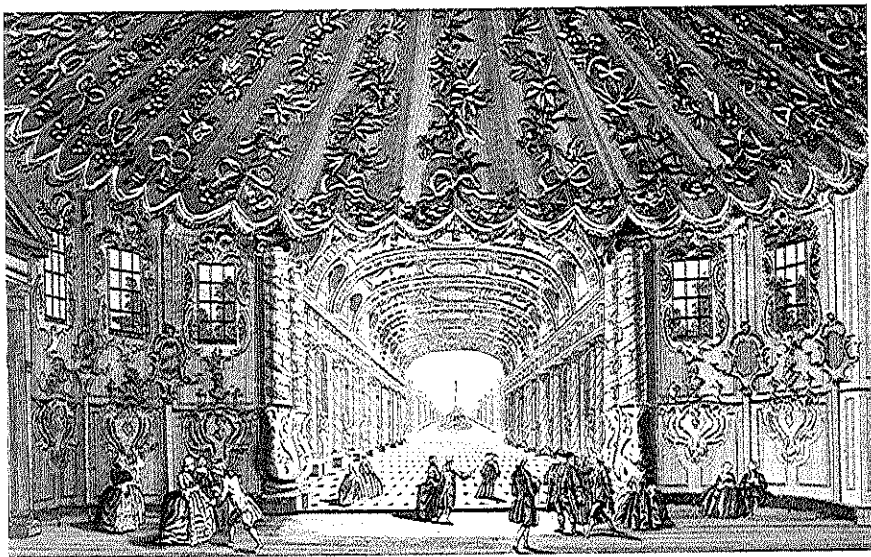
The philosophes sought the same status and freedom for artists that they demanded for writers. They believed that the arts had to be not only unfettered by censorship but also subject to critical inquiry. Some philosophes worked toward a philosophy of art, but they did not espouse a single theory. The distinguished English portrait painter Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)

believed that classical rules preserved from antiquity had to be followed. But David Hume, among other Enlightenment figures, emphasized the aesthetic appreciation of art, rejecting formal rules or standards for art imposed by royal academies or ecclesiastical influence.

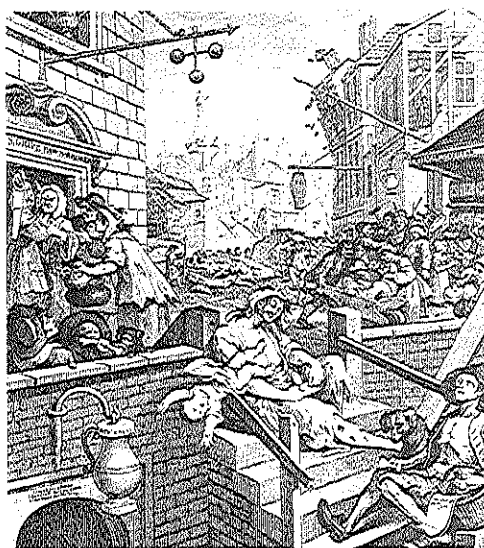
The secularization of culture could be seen in the development of rococo, a new and generally secular decorative style. It evolved from the highly ornamental baroque style that had characterized the art and architecture of the Catholic Reformation, particularly in Austria and Bavaria. Closely tied to noble taste, rococo's popularity in France reflected the fact that many nobles now spent more time in elegant townhouses. However spacious, such urban residences afforded them less room than they enjoyed in their countryside châteaux. They therefore lavished more attention on decoration.

The rococo style—sometimes called Louis XV style—began in France but also became quite popular in the German and Italian states. Like the baroque, it featured flowing curves, thus suggesting rocks and shells (*rocailles* and *coquilles*, thus its name). Rococo stressed smallness of scale, reducing baroque forms to elegant decorative style. It utilized different materials, including wood, metal, stucco, glass, and porcelain, brought for the first time from China during the eighteenth century and reflecting the growing interest in Asia. It combined texture and color with spirited and even erotic subject matter. Elements drawn from nature, such as birds and flowers, replaced religious objects as decorative elements.

Engraving depicting the grand rococo style that was popular in France in the eighteenth century.



Although Greek mythology and religious themes remained popular, eighteenth-century painters found new sources for artistic inspiration. The French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) influenced the artistic move away from traditional religious subjects laden with didactic meaning toward lighter, more secular themes. Adopting a more realistic style than baroque painting, he depicted elegantly dressed noble subjects at leisure. Painters adopted the rococo style, emphasizing smallness of scale. As the market for painting widened, scenes of nature and everyday life also became popular, as they had a century earlier in the Netherlands.



William Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1751) is a commentary on the deleterious impact of alcohol on the poor of eighteenth-century London.

In France, the Academy of Painting and Sculpture organized the first public art exhibition in Paris in 1737, bringing together viewers of different social classes. The expanding middle-class art market and the growing secularization of artistic taste was nowhere more apparent than in Britain. William Hogarth (1697–1764) portrayed everyday life in London with affection and satire. He was as adept at conveying the elegance of London's parks as the depravation of the city's notorious "Gin Lane." He poked fun at the hearty Englishman putting away pounds of roast beef (Hogarth himself died after eating a huge steak), the dishonest lawyer, the clergyman looking for a better post while ignoring his pastoral duties, and the laboring poor drowning their sorrows in cheap gin, a plague that led the government to raise the tax on alcohol.

Music

The taste for music moved beyond the constraints of court, ecclesiastical, and noble patronage. Opera's great popularity in the seventeenth century had been closely tied to ornate opera houses constructed at European courts. Composers and their music passed from court to court. Court composers were considered the equivalent of favored upper servants. The German composer George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) gratefully accepted the patronage of several English aristocrats as well as King George II. When someone asked Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), who worked as

kapellmeister (orchestra director) for the fabulously wealthy Esterházy family of Hungary, why he had never written any quintets, he replied, "Nobody has ordered any."

In the early 1750s, Rousseau penned stinging attacks on French opera. Readers understood his strident language as he intended—he was denouncing court and aristocratic taste itself. Rousseau compared the Royal Academy of Music's monopoly on French music to a ruthless Inquisition that stifled imagination. Rousseau's critique generated a storm of controversy because it seemed to be nothing less than a denunciation of the social and cultural foundations of contemporary French society. Like his philosophical works, Rousseau's operatic compositions extolled the simple, unpretentious life of rural people.

In England, concerts were held at court or in the homes of wealthy families; in Italy, they were sponsored by groups of educated people who gathered to discuss science and the arts; and in Switzerland, concerts were sponsored by societies of music lovers. The public concert also emerged in some German cities early in the eighteenth century. Gradually public concert halls were built in the capitals of Europe. Handel began to perform his operas and concerts in rented theaters, attracting large crowds. By the 1790s, Haydn was conducting his symphonies in public concerts in London.

The short, brilliant life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) reflected the gradual evolution from dependence on court and aristocratic



The young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart at a pianoforte.

patronage to the emergence of the public concert. Mozart began playing the harpsichord at age three and composing at five. In 1763, his father took him and his sister on a tour of European courts that would last three years, hoping to make the family fortune, with mixed results. Mozart returned to Paris in 1778 at his father's insistence that he "get a job or at least make some money." The temperamental Mozart failed to make his way in the social world of Paris: "I would wish for his fortune," a contemporary wrote, "that he had half as much talent and twice as much tact."

Thereafter Mozart resided in his native Salzburg, where he served as unhappy court

musician of an unpleasant archbishop. Mozart wrote church music and light music, including a hunting symphony for strings, two horns, dogs, and a rifle, before resigning after quarreling with his patron. Mozart spent money as rapidly as he made it and was constantly in debt, unable to attract the lavish court, noble, or ecclesiastical patronage he desired. But his schedule increasingly included public concerts. Unlike Handel, Mozart died a poor man at age thirty-five and was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave in Vienna.

A prolific genius, Mozart moved away from the melodious regularity of his predecessors to more varied and freely articulated compositions. The operas *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) and *Don Giovanni* (1787) demonstrated Mozart's capacity to present characters from many walks of life, revealing not only their shared humanity but their personal moods and expectations. *The Magic Flute* (1791), his last opera, expressed his belief in the ability of mankind to develop greater virtue and a capacity for love. Mozart thus shared the confident optimism of the philosophes.

The Spread of Enlightened Ideas

Salons, academies, and Masonic lodges helped spread Enlightenment thought. Salons, which brought together people of means, noble and bourgeois alike, in private homes for sociability and discussion, were concentrated in Paris, but they were also found in Berlin, London, and Vienna, as well as in some smaller provincial towns. The English historian Edward Gibbon claimed that in two weeks in Paris he had "heard more conversation worth remembering than I had done in two or three winters in London." The salons of Paris were organized and hosted mainly by women, who selected topics for discussion and presided over conversations. In Warsaw, Princess Sophia Czartoryska's salon played an important role in conveying Enlightenment ideas to Polish elites. In London, women hosted similar gatherings, some composed exclusively of women.

In Paris Madame Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin hosted artists on Monday and men of letters on Wednesday. "I well remember seeing all Europe standing three deep around her chair," recalled one of her visitors. Her husband sat silently at the other end of the table while his wife put the philosophes through their paces. One night, a regular guest noted that the place where the silent man usually sat was empty and asked where he was. "He was my husband," came the laconic reply, "and he's dead."

Salon guests could discuss the work of the philosophes without fear of police interference. By the middle of the century, political discussions increasingly captured intellectuals' attention. Not all ideas discussed, of course, were of equal merit. In the 1780s, a German scientist, Franz Mesmer (1734–1815), proclaimed the healing properties of electromagnetic treatments. "Mesmerism" attracted considerable interest in the salons of Paris, where the nature of the "universal fluid" that Mesmer and his disciples



An actor reading from a work of Voltaire at the salon of Madame Geoffrin. Note the bust of Voltaire, then in exile.

believed linked the human body to the universe, was debated. The French Academy of Science vigorously denounced Mesmerism as nothing more than resourceful charlatanism.

In France and in some Italian cities academies played a similar role to that of the salons. These were not “academies” in the sense of offering an organized curriculum, but rather formal gatherings taking place about every two weeks of people interested in science and philosophy. Meetings consisted of reading minutes and correspondence, followed by lectures and debates. The academies also helped spread Enlightenment ideas by bringing together people, including some clergymen, eager to discuss the works of the philosophes. Unlike the salons, women (with several exceptions) were not elected to the academies.

The French academies served two masters: the king and the public. They depended on royal intendants, governors, and other state officials for funding and meeting places. The monarchy believed that the academies served the public interest because members discussed questions of contemporary importance. Some academies sponsored essay competitions in the arts and sciences; during the decade of the 1780s, more than 600 such competitions were held. Topics increasingly reflected Enlightenment influence, such as “religious intolerance and the role of magistrates in the defense of liberty.”

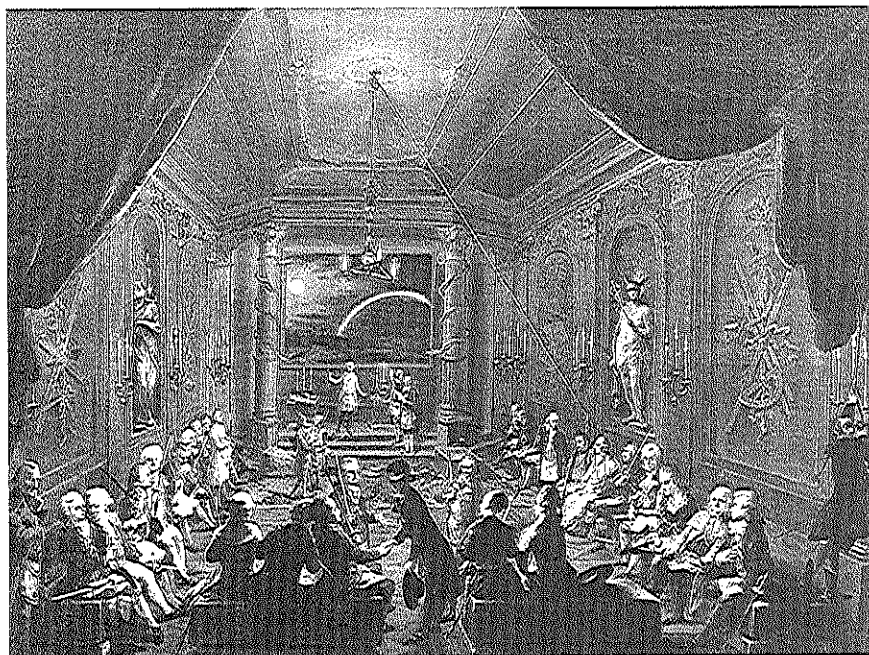
Many members of the provincial academies began by mid-century to think of themselves both as representing public opinion in their role as informal counselors to the monarchy, and interpreting the sciences and

philosophy for a more general audience. Thus the academies contributed to the development of a sense that reforms in France were possible.

Masonic lodges, another medium for the ideas of the philosophes, had begun in Scotland, perhaps as early as the sixteenth century, as stonemasons' guilds. They now brought together freethinkers and others who opposed the influence of the established churches in public life. Masonic lodges proliferated in Europe during the middle years of the eighteenth century. Members took vows of secrecy, although their meetings, membership lists, and rituals were widely known. In some places women were admitted as affiliated or adopted members. Members held a variety of political opinions, but they shared a general faith in progress, toleration, and a critical view of institutionalized religion. In Scotland in particular, clubs, coffeehouses, and taverns also provided the setting for discussion of the new ideas.

Still, several obstacles limited the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas. Books and even pamphlets were expensive. Censorship, although erratic and varying greatly from place to place, also discouraged publication. In France and Spain, among other countries, censored books were burned, and those who published material officially considered blasphemous could be, at least in principle, sentenced to death. Far more frequently, officials closed printers' shops. Even the relatively tolerant Dutch Republic banned Diderot's

A gathering of a Masonic lodge in Vienna. Masonic rituals included the use of allegorical symbols, blindfolds, and swords.



Philosophic Thoughts as an attack on religion. In the face of a spate of publications critical of monarchy, aristocracy, and the Church, Louis XV (ruled 1715–1774) promulgated censorship laws in 1757 that were much harsher than those regulating the book trade in England. The French monarchy also controlled what was published through the licensing of printers, booksellers, and peddlers.

ENLIGHTENED ABSOLUTISM

The philosophes believed that the success of any state depended on the degree of freedom and happiness it was able to assure its people. As David Hume put it, a state is justified by the good that is done in its name. Voltaire and Diderot, in particular, believed in “enlightened absolutism.” They wanted enlightened monarchs to impose reforms that would benefit their subjects. Leopold II of Tuscany (1747–1792), the most significant reformer of his era, went so far as to declare that “the sovereign, even if hereditary, is only the delegate of his people.” Rousseau, however, warned that absolutism and enlightened thinking were incompatible. However, some rulers applied Enlightenment “rationality” to statecraft, with the goal, above all, of making their regimes more efficient.

Reform of Jurisprudence

Cesare Bonesana, the marquis of Beccaria (1738–1794), had the greatest influence on his era as a reformer influenced by the Enlightenment. A noble from Milan, Beccaria became a professor of political philosophy in Habsburg Austria and ended his career advising the state chancellery on such diverse topics as agriculture, mining, and trade. He made his reputation, however, with his ideas on crime and punishment.

In *On Crimes and Punishment* (1764), Beccaria, who had read Montesquieu, Buffon, Diderot, and Rousseau, applied their analysis to the issues at hand. He argued that the state’s task was to protect society while respecting the dignity of all people. This meant that the rights of those accused of crimes, too, had to be protected. Beccaria wanted standard procedures to govern criminal trials, so that rich and poor would stand equal before the law. The Italian philosopher’s assumption that the accused is innocent until proven guilty has remained, along with the tradition of English constitutional law and trial by jury, a cornerstone of Western judicial systems.

Beccaria argued that the punishment for a given crime should not be linked to the religious concept of sin, but rather rationally determined by an assessment of the damage done to society. He argued that “it is better to prevent crimes than to punish them.” His principles reflected the origins of utilitarianism, the influential social theory of the first decades of the nineteenth century that held that laws should be judged by their social utility.

Beccaria opposed torture to extract confessions or render punishment. Barbarous punishment, instead of protecting society, seemed only to encourage disrespect for the law and more awful crimes. This led him to object to capital punishment, lamenting the enthusiastic crowds that were attracted to public executions. Leopold II of Tuscany (who admired Beccaria), Gustavus III of Sweden, and Frederick the Great of Prussia banned torture—clear examples of the influence of enlightened thought on contemporary rulers.

Educational Reform

Education in the widest sense was central to the program of the philosophes. The Empress Catherine the Great of Russia (ruled 1762–1796) admired and read Montesquieu and Voltaire, hosted Diderot, and purchased the latter's library for a handsome price. Born a German princess, she was contemptuous of Russian culture and preferred French. She seemed to heed the advice she had received from Diderot: "To instruct a nation is to civilize it." Catherine established a school for the daughters of nobles. Without eliminating censorship, she authorized the first private printing presses and encouraged the publication of more books.

A few other monarchs implemented educational reforms, but they did so at least partially to assure a supply of able civil servants. In 1774, Joseph II (1741–1790) established a structured, centralized system of education from primary school to university, which doubled the number of elementary schools in Bohemia. In Poland, the Sejm created the Commission for National Education in 1773 to serve as a ministry for education, overseeing Poland's universities in Krakow and Vilnius, as well as all secondary and parish schools. During this period in Central and Eastern Europe, textbooks appeared in the Magyar, German, Croatian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Romanian languages.



Empress Catherine the Great.

Religious Toleration

Although the eighteenth century was a period of relative religious peace, intolerance could still be intense. In England, Catholics, in particular, suffered legal discrimination (see

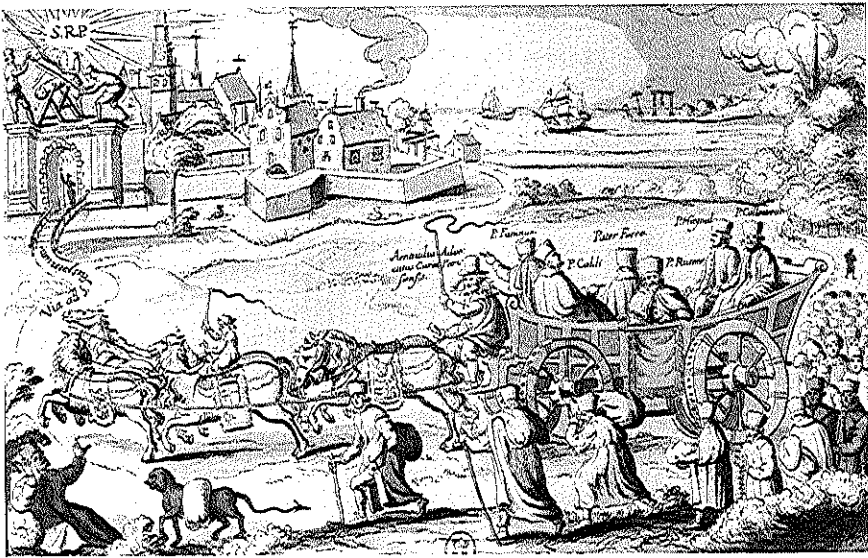
Chapter 11), and could not vote or be elected to the House of Commons. French Protestants had no civil rights; their births, baptisms, and marriages were considered not to have occurred unless registered by a Catholic priest. Protestants suffered discrimination in Hungary and the Catholic Rhineland. In Austria, in 1728 the bishop of Salzburg gave 20,000 Protestants three days to leave their homes, and royal edicts forced Protestants out of Upper Austria and Styria during the next decade.

Europe's 3 million Jews suffered intolerance and often persecution all across Europe—especially in Eastern Europe. Jews could not hold titles of nobility, join guilds, or hold municipal office. In many places, they could own land, although in some German states they needed special permission to buy houses. They were excluded from agricultural occupations and certain trades in France, Eastern Europe, and Russia. The Habsburg monarchy required Jews to stay inside until noon on Sundays, and in 1745 it suddenly ordered the thousands of Jews living in Prague to leave. In Vienna and Zurich, Jews were confined to ghettos, and in several German towns they were not allowed inside the city walls. Although the Swedish government allowed Jews to build synagogues beginning in 1782, they could reside only in certain cities, and were forbidden to marry anyone who was not Jewish, to purchase land, or to produce handicrafts.

Because moneylending had been one of the few professions Jews were allowed to practice, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Jews faced resentment from peasants who often owed them money. In Poland the Catholic Church often led the way in persecution; rumors that Jews were ritually sacrificing Christian children during Passover found credulous ears. In 1762, Ukrainian peasants killed at least 20,000 Jews in the bloodiest pogrom of the century. Yet, by about 1750, Western Europe seemed to be entering a more tolerant age. For one thing, intolerance generated periodic rebellions, which took state funds to put down. But a more humanitarian spirit could also be felt.

Some of the rulers who undertook religious reforms were inspired by a desire to strengthen their authority. This was the case in the expulsion of the Jesuits from several countries, which highlighted the struggle between the popes and Catholic monarchs. The Jesuits had been closely identified with the papacy since the inception of the order during the Catholic Reformation. They had gained great influence as tutors to powerful noble families and in the Spanish, French, and Portuguese colonies in the Americas. Catholic kings perceived the Jesuits as a threat to their authority.

In Portugal, King John V's strong-willed minister, Sebastião, the marquis of Pombal (1699–1782), enhanced the monarchy's authority at the expense of the great noble families and the Church. When Jesuits criticized the regime for, among other things, orchestrating anti-Semitism, Pombal accused them of exploiting the indigenous population of Paraguay, where they virtually ran the colonial state. After Pombal falsely accused the order of planning the king's assassination, the monarch expelled the Jesuits from



Jesuits being expelled from Spain, 1764.

Portugal in 1759. Ten years later, Pombal ended the Inquisition's status as an independent tribunal, making it a royal court. Other rulers followed suit, including Louis XV of France in 1764. The expulsion of the Jesuits from some of the most powerful Catholic states reflected the diminishing power of the papacy in the face of absolute monarchs determined to retain control over what they considered to be national churches.

In Spain, Charles III (ruled 1759–1788) ordered universities to include instruction in science and philosophy. In 1781, Spain carried out its last execution of a person accused of heretical religious beliefs. Charles then reduced the feared Spanish Inquisition to a series of legal hurdles governing publishing. Like the kings of Portugal and France, Charles III in 1776 expelled the Jesuits in part because their near-monopoly on education seemed to pose a threat to the monarchy's control over the Church. In Italy, Leopold II also reduced the authority of the Church in Tuscany, ending the tithe and crippling the Inquisition. Catherine the Great's enlightened approach to religion could be seen in her termination of official (or "government") persecution of Old Believers, the dissident sect within the Russian Orthodox Church. And when Jews came under tsarist rule for the first time after the first Partition of Poland in 1772 (see Chapter 11), she initially placed Jewish merchants and other townspeople on an equal basis with their Christian neighbors. However, protests brought Catherine to adopt more restrictive measures. In 1794 she introduced double taxation for Jews. Louis XVI granted French Protestants most civil rights in 1787. And in Great Britain the following year Parliament reduced some restrictions on

Catholics—although they still could not hold public office. Nonetheless, London crowds shouting “No popery!” attacked the property of Catholics during the “Gordon riots,” in which almost 300 people were killed. In 1792, however, the first legal Catholic church in England since the sixteenth century opened its doors in London.

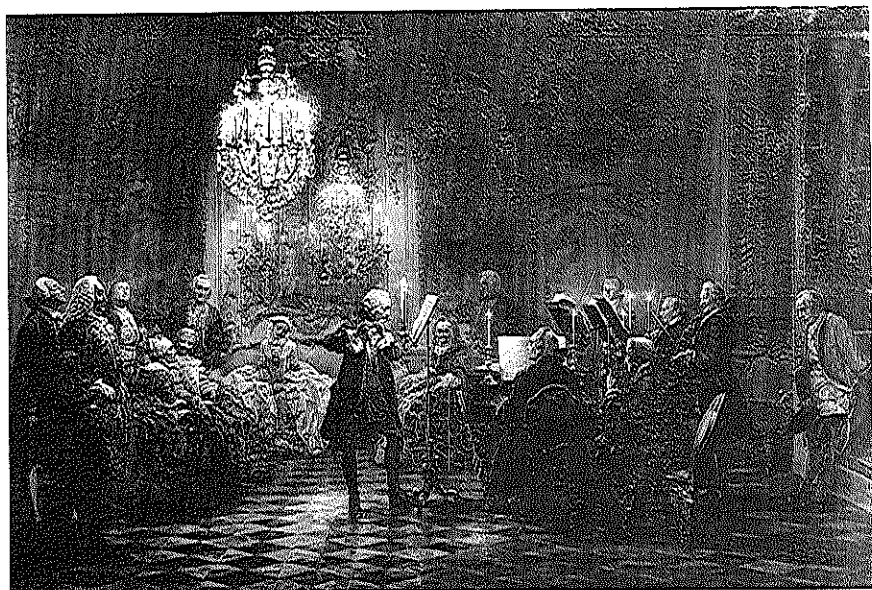
Protestant states seemed most receptive to religious toleration. In the northern German states and Swiss cantons, the ideals of the philosophes provided support for religious toleration that had grown out of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The quest for religious tolerance played an important part in German enlightened thought. In his drama *Nathan the Wise* (1779), Gotthold Lessing argued that people of all religions are members of the human family. In Catholic Austria, Joseph II's relaxation of censorship permitted a spate of pamphlets and brochures calling for toleration of Protestants. The king's Edict of Toleration (1781) extended some toleration to non-Catholics. The edict included Jews, who were now “free” to bear the burden of a “toleration tax” and to pay an assessment on kosher meat. Joseph also ennobled several Jews, incurring the wrath of other nobles. Moreover, for the first time, Protestants could enter the Habsburg civil service.

Frederick the Great

The German states appeared to be the most fertile ground for enlightened absolutism. German philosophes remained closely tied to the existing order, looking to the individual states and to religion for reforms. They were less critical of the state than their French counterparts. For Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the Enlightenment meant the liberation of the individual intellectually and morally, but not politically or socially. The individual should think critically, but also obey.

Frederick II of Prussia (ruled 1740–1786 and known as Frederick the Great), wanted to be remembered as an enlightened ruler. A man of considerable intelligence, he turned his court into a center of learning for the nobility. “Sans Souci,” his rococo château in Potsdam outside Berlin, had French formal gardens and was considered the height of civility. Frederick, a flute-playing “philosopher-king,” made Voltaire the centerpiece of his palace for two years. Voltaire praised Frederick for having transformed “a sad Sparta into a brilliant Athens.” But the French philosophe soon grew disenchanted with the cynical, manipulative Prussian king, who coolly invaded the Habsburg territory of Silesia in 1740, in the first year of his reign. Voltaire angered Frederick by lampooning a royal favorite, and when the king ordered his hangman to burn the offending tract publicly, Voltaire took the hint and left Potsdam in 1752.

But Frederick again borrowed Enlightenment discourse when he claimed that one of his major tasks was “to make people as happy as is compatible with human nature and the means at my disposal.” He once



Frederick the Great playing the flute at Sans Souci.

claimed somewhat disingenuously that he was nothing more than the “first servant” of his people as king: “I well know that the rich have many advocates, but the poor have only one, and that is I.” Frederick freed the serfs of the royal domains (1763) and ordered the abolition of the lords’ right to punish their own serfs physically. Judicial reforms ended some flagrant abuses by magistrates. The Prussian king relaxed censorship and abolished capital punishment, except in the army. Yet he refused to emancipate Prussian Jews, while continuing to depend on loans from them. Nonetheless, the Prussian Code, finally completed and promulgated in 1794, eight years after Frederick’s death, granted “every inhabitant of the state . . . complete freedom of religion and conscience.”

Frederick the Great’s “enlightened” reforms were, above all, intended to make the Prussian state more powerful, not more just (see Chapter 11). He made Prussia a more efficient absolutist state. Frederick intended his law code to enhance the reach of the state rather than to make his people equal before the law. When he freed the serfs of the royal domains, it was because he needed them in the army. Nobles (Junkers) dominated most of the plum positions as military officers and high officials. Yet some commoners did in fact rise to important posts, including some army officers, who were subsequently ennobled. Frederick improved the state bureaucracy by introducing an examination system to govern entry. In the courts of justice, candidates had to pass the most difficult examinations, and in Berlin only a third of all judges were nobles.

Prussian law reinforced the distinction between noble and commoner. The Prussian Code divided Prussian society into noble, bourgeois, and common estates. Frederick bolstered the position of Prussian nobles because he was determined to prevent any erosion of their status as the landowning class. He refused to ban serfdom on private estates, and he created institutions that would provide credit to nobles in financial difficulty. Nobles were not permitted to sell their lands to non-nobles, and marriages between nobles and commoners were not recognized.

The Prussian monarch's *Essay on the Forms of Government* (1781) offered a recipe for enhancing the efficiency of the absolute state. Frederick's view of the world bound the state and the individual subject together. When their mutual interests could not be reconciled, however, the Prussian state always took precedence. As Voltaire had discovered for himself, Frederick the Great's reign reflected the limitations of enlightened absolutism.

Rural Reforms

Several other European rulers tried to improve conditions of rural life. Leopold II, who promulgated a new code of laws in 1786 and established a new and more independent judiciary, ended some restrictions on the grain trade, freeing the price of grain. These moves were popular among merchants and wealthy peasants, but not among poor people, who depended upon bread to survive. Following the disastrous decade of the 1770s, marked by hunger and disease, Austrian Queen Maria Theresa banned the mistreatment of peasants by their lords and tried to limit seigniorial obligations. As she put it, sheep must be well fed if they are to yield more wool and milk. Her son Joseph II abolished serfdom in 1781, converting peasant labor obligations into an annual payment to the lord, and ended obligations of personal service to the lord. Henceforth a peasant could marry and/or leave the land without the lord's permission. Peasants, at least in principle, could also turn to the state for support against an oppressive lord; they could even take the lord to court. However, Joseph II's Serfdom Patent encountered resistance among landowners and regional powers in the eastern regions of the empire. The nobility of Bohemia simply refused to enact any of the provisions, while nobles in Transylvania neglected to inform the peasants of any changes in their condition. In Hungary, the estate owners insisted that their peasants were not actually serfs but simple tenants and therefore not covered by the law. In the German-speaking parts of the empire, the Serfdom Patent granted the serfs legal rights but left most of the financial obligations of the old system intact. And in Tuscany, as in the Habsburg domains, aristocrats and state officials sabotaged Leopold's reforms.

Reasons of state lay behind even these seemingly enlightened reforms. By restricting labor obligations in some parts of the empire, peasants now owed the state even more taxes and were subject to a longer term of mili-

tary service. Peasants, though legally free, remained indebted to their lords. Thus, "enlightened" reforms had little effect on the lives of most peasants.

Joseph II announced that he wanted the Habsburg state to follow "uniform principles," which included a reorganization of the imperial bureaucracy. He taxed Church property, abolished some monastic orders, and forced a reorganization of the Church within the Habsburg domains. None of the "enlightened" rulers gave up any of his or her monarchical prerogatives.

Catherine the Great, influenced by Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, wanted the nobility to serve as an "intermediary body" standing between the crown and its subjects. Catherine hoped that by clarifying their rights, nobles might contribute to the functioning and glory of her state. The Charter of the Nobility of 1785 formalized the relationship between the autocratic state and the nobles, recognizing the nobility of blood as equal to that of service. It confirmed their security of property, the right to hold serfs, and immunity from arrest and confiscation of property by the state. For the first time, nobles could travel abroad without the permission of the emperor. Local elective councils of nobles could henceforth send petitions to the tsar or empress, but the latter had no obligation to respond. Catherine herself turned against Enlightenment thought, however, fearing that it might become a tool of those opposed to absolute rule. Like Voltaire's experience at the court of Frederick the Great, Diderot's confidence in Catherine ended in disappointment when, to his chagrin, he learned that the empress had imprisoned those with whom she disagreed.

CURRENTS OF THE LATE ENLIGHTENMENT

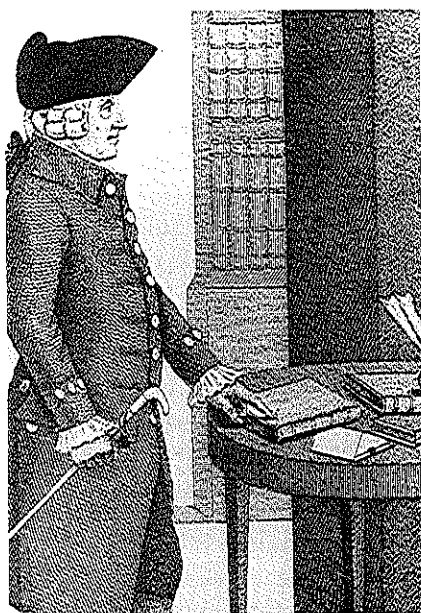
The late Enlightenment contained several currents. British economists applied the concept of freedom for the first time to the workings of the economy. Meanwhile, on the continent, philosophes turned away from the preoccupation with rationality and the laws of nature. The mark of human freedom was no longer the exercise of reason but the expression of the emotions. Rousseau himself had begun this turn toward what he called "reasoned sentimentality" by stressing the importance of emotional development and fulfillment. In a related development, a number of writers began to "discover" and embrace their own national cultures, seeking their origins in medieval poems and songs. And in France, when there were no more Voltaires or Rousseaus, a generation of would-be philosophes, mediocre writers who attacked the institutional structure of the French monarchy, influenced public opinion. All of these developments served to undermine the established order (see Chapter 11). The late Enlightenment's emphasis on the historical roots of national culture provided a way of conceptualizing national identity, a transformation that would, for example, have enormous consequences in Europe in the nineteenth century and beyond.

The philosophers' quest to discover the laws of nature and society led several of them to try to establish a set of laws that could explain the working of the economy. This search led away from mercantilism, which had formed the basis of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century economic theory, to the emergence of classical economic liberalism. Mercantilist theory held that states should protect their economies with restrictions and tariffs that would maintain a favorable balance of trade, with more gold and silver flowing into a nation than going out.

The "physiocrats" believed that land, not gold and silver, was the source of all wealth. They wanted to end state interference in agriculture and the commerce of farm products. Writing in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, François Quesnay (1694–1774), a French doctor and economist, called on the monarchy to free the grain trade and end arbitrary controls on prices, which states sometimes imposed to preserve public order. He and other physiocrats insisted that higher prices for goods would encourage production, thereby bringing about lower prices over the long run. The physiocrats also encouraged wealthy landowners to put science to work to increase farm yields, and wanted enlightened rulers to free the agricultural economy from tolls and internal tariffs. In England, where commercial agriculture was already well developed, the physiocrats attracted an interested following.

However, when the oddly named Anne-Robert Turgot (1727–1781), Louis XVI's controller-general, freed France's grain trade from controls in the early 1770s, disastrous shortages accompanied a series of bad harvests (see Chapter 11). Hoarding contributed to much higher prices; grain riots followed, and the experiment soon ended with the old strictures and controls back in place.

Adam Smith (1723–1790), a Scottish professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow, argued against some of the hallmarks of mercantilism in his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). In the name of freeing the economy from restraints, he opposed guild restrictions and monopolies, as well as trade barriers and other forms of protectionism. Such bold proposals



Adam Smith admiring his book, *The Wealth of Nations*.

flew in the face of contemporary economic thought, which held closely to regulated monopolies and remained suspicious of free-market competition. Merchants looked to the state to provide financial, political, and military protection. The Scottish philosopher's optimistic doctrine came to be known universally by its French name, "*laissez-faire*," or "leave alone." Each person, Smith insisted, should be "free to pursue his own interest his own way." If "left alone," Smith argued, the British economy would thrive naturally, generating domestic and foreign markets. The "invisible hand" of the unfettered economy would over time cause the forces of supply and demand to meet, determining the price of goods. By overcoming that "wretched spirit of monopoly," which made people less energetic, the "virtue of the marketplace" would also enhance social happiness and civic virtue. This was a common theme in the Scottish Enlightenment—Scottish philosophes were particularly concerned with how civic virtue and public morality could be inculcated in a society being slowly transformed by commerce and manufacture.

German Idealism

While in England the late Enlightenment brought an emphasis on economic freedom, on the continent it was marked by subjectivism and a greater emphasis on emotion, a shift already reflected by Rousseau's "reasoned sentimentality." The basic tenet of German idealism was that we perceive and understand the world through the medium of our ideas, and not through the direct application of our senses. Kant was the foremost proponent of this school. Born an artisan's son in the Prussian town of Königsberg, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) affirmed that rational inquiry into nature leads to knowledge. In his memorable analogy, reason is like a judge who "compels the witness to answer questions which he himself has formulated." But for Kant, reason alone was not the basis for our knowledge of the world. Instead, each person understands the world through concepts that cannot be separated from his or her unique experience. This philosophy undermined faith in the rational objectivity and universalism that had characterized the high Enlightenment. German idealism invited the subjectivity and relativism of early nineteenth-century romanticism.

In the eighteenth century, writers became interested in discovering the roots of national cultures; Sweden, Denmark, Russia, and Poland all discovered their "national" literatures, written in their own languages. The first Czech national theater opened in Prague in 1737. Gotthold Lessing proudly wrote in German and called for a national theater. Scottish readers eagerly saluted the "discovery" by the poet James Macpherson (1736–1796) of the work of an imaginary Gaelic bard of the third century, Ossian. Macpherson's publication in the early 1760s of what he claimed were translations of the poet he called the Gaelic Homer set off a bitter debate, one that contributed to the emergence of Scottish romanticism.

Composers began to borrow from popular culture, especially from folk music not necessarily religious in inspiration. The first Jewish periodicals were published in Königsberg in the century's last decades, and the first Jewish school established in Berlin in 1778. The emotional search for and enthusiastic identification with national cultures contributed, as in the case of Scotland, to the development of romanticism, and very gradually of nationalism. Nationalism would help undermine the established order in several continental states, notably France, where the established order was based on allegiance to a monarchical dynasty and often to established religion as well, and not yet necessarily on national identity.

The Enlightenment and Public Opinion

Public opinion, a concept we take for granted, did not always exist. But it began to take shape in French, English, and several other European languages in the eighteenth century (see Chapter 11). During the 1770s, more people in France discussed the pressing political issues of the day than ever before. Lawyers helped establish the concept of public opinion when they sought a wide spectrum of support for the parlements. Louis XV had decided to replace these provincial noble law courts in 1768 with malleable institutions more directly under royal control. Public opinion forced the king to restore the parlements six years later. Public opinion, to which opponents of the monarchy and increasingly the court itself now appealed, provided a forum in which political ideas were increasingly discussed. These ideas were shaped by Enlightenment discourse on political sovereignty and the limits of absolute rule.

A number of the treatises published during the late Enlightenment dealt with contemporary political issues, in the tradition of Voltaire's broadsides at the time of the Calas Affair, which had exposed the consequences of intolerance and persecution to public opinion. As the financial crisis of the French monarchy worsened during the 1780s, such publications would help make the question of reform an increasingly national issue.

Forbidden Publications and the Undermining of Authority

Some of the fringe members of the republic of letters, whom Voltaire had dismissed as mere "scribblers," also undermined respect for the monarchy and the royal family. Whereas the milieu of the philosophes earlier in the century had been elegant salons, the would-be philosophes of the last period of the Enlightenment hung around cheap cafés, lived in rooms high above the street, and dodged creditors by frequently changing addresses. At the same time, they insisted that royal censorship blocked their ascent to better things. Some made a modest living peddling forbidden publications. While claiming common cause with the major philosophes against the unenlightened institutions of France, some wrote pornography or penned

pieces slandering prominent people, including the royal family, and a few kept afloat by spying on other writers for the police. There had been such publications before the 1770s and 1780s, but never so many of them, and never had they been so widely read.

Banned books reached France through the efforts of resourceful shipping agents, transporters, bargemen, dockers, and peddlers, who smuggled books published in Switzerland or the Austrian Netherlands to French booksellers willing to circumvent the controls of the booksellers' guild and the state. In 1783, the crown redoubled its efforts to stem the tide of smuggled books and to still the clandestine presses within France. These publishers undercut the legitimate Parisian book trade because they published banned books and produced cheaper editions of acceptable works. Moreover, royal officials were concerned about the effects of these smuggled satires on public opinion.

Was there any connection between the high-minded philosophes and their "successors," who included the authors of *Venus in the Cloister*, or the *Nun in a Nightgown*; *Christianity Unveiled*; and *Margot the Campfollower*? In fact, the envious and mediocre descendants of the philosophes in some ways continued their predecessors' work by undermining respect for the authority of the Church, the aristocracy, and, above all, the monarchy.

Moreover, certain themes of the Enlightenment did find their way into their work. They joined their far more illustrious predecessors in attacking the foundations of the French monarchy. Frustrated authors attacked the privileges, for example, of the printing and booksellers' guild, which they blamed for keeping them from reaching the stature they desired. Their identification of censorship with despotism, though self-serving, was nonetheless effective, as they argued that only its abolition could permit the free exchange of ideas. Political events and scandals kept the presses of the literary underground turning, fanning popular critiques of the monarchy, Church, and nobility.

LEGACY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment philosophes celebrated reason, while acknowledging the passions, and were suspicious of pure faith. Steeped in respect for science and reason and confident that humanity would discover the truths of nature, they were optimistic about human potential. The philosophes' belief in progress, which Kant insisted was a sign of modernity, separated them sharply from the Catholic Church, in particular. Yet, they were not as naive, uncritical, or foolish as Voltaire's *Candide*, who thought progress inevitable. The philosophes believed that the combination of thought, study, education, and action would lead to a better future. States, they thought, were not ordained by God but by mankind and, like other phenomena, should be subject to critical scrutiny.

The philosophes' belief in human dignity led them to oppose all forms of despotism. Most spoke out against religious intolerance, torture, and slavery. (Yet an effective campaign against slavery, launched by the English abolitionists of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787, stood independent of the Enlightenment). Furthermore, some Enlightenment thinkers and writers recognized that contemporary assertions about the inequality of women contradicted their understanding of nature.

Some philosophes had strong reservations about the ability of individuals to develop equally. "As for the rabble," Voltaire once said, "I don't concern myself with it; they will always remain rabble." Those with power and influence first must be enlightened, they reasoned, so that eventually everyone could develop through education. However, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Voltaire supported the right to divorce, but also opposed equal status for women.

In their commitment to individual freedom the philosophes influenced the subsequent history of the Western world. Whereas most people in the eighteenth century still considered the monarchy to be the repository of the public good, the philosophes proclaimed that the public had rights of its own and that freedom was a good in itself. Enlightenment thought helped create a discourse of principled opposition that would shake the foundations of absolutism. If the philosophes themselves were not revolutionaries, many of their ideas in the context of eighteenth-century Europe were indeed revolutionary.