

enterprise was growing. In some manufacturing districts several thousand workers might be employed to produce the same product.

New inventions changed the pattern of work as well as the nature of the product. Knitting frames, simple devices to speed the manufacture of textile goods, made their appearance in Britain and Holland. Wire-drawing machines and slitting mills, which allowed nail makers to convert iron bars into rods, spread from Germany into Britain. Techniques for printing colored designs directly on calico cloth were imported from Asia. New and more efficient printing presses appeared, first in Holland and then elsewhere.

Workers did not readily accept innovations of this kind. Labor-saving machines threw people out of work. Artisans, especially those organized into guilds, were by nature conservative, anxious to protect not only their rights but also the secrets of their trade. Governments would often intervene to block the use of machines if they threatened to increase unemployment or create unrest. States might also act to protect the interests of their powerful commercial and financial backers. Both Britain and France outlawed calico printing for a time, to protect local textile manufacturers and importers of Indian goods. Mercantilist doctrines could also impede innovation. In both Paris and Lyons, for example, the use of indigo dyes was banned because they were manufactured abroad. But the pressures for economic innovation were irresistible, because behind them lay an insatiable eighteenth-century appetite for goods.

A World of Goods

In the eighteenth century, a mass market for consumer goods emerged, concentrated at first in northwestern Europe. Houses of middling ranks were now stocked with hitherto uncommon luxuries such as sugar, tobacco, tea, coffee, chocolate, newspapers, books, pictures, clocks, toys, china, glassware, pewter, silver plate, soap, razors, furniture (including beds with mattresses, chairs, and chests of drawers), shoes, cotton cloth, and spare clothing. Demand for such products consistently outstripped the supply, causing prices for these items to rise faster than the price of foodstuffs throughout the century. But the demand for them continued unabated.

The exploding consumer economy of the eighteenth century also encouraged the provision of services. In eighteenth-century Britain, the service sector was the fastest-growing part of the economy, outstripping both agriculture and manufacturing. Almost everywhere in urban



TOPSY-TURVY WORLD BY JAN STEEN. This Dutch painting depicts a household in the throes of the exploding consumer economy that hit Europe by the end of the seventeenth century. Consumer goods ranging from silver and china to clothing and furniture cluttered the houses of ordinary people as never before.

Europe, the eighteenth century was the golden age of the small shopkeeper. People bought more prepared foods and more ready-made (as opposed to personally tailored) clothing. Advertising became an important part of doing business, helping create demand for new products and shaping popular taste for changing fashions. Even political allegiances could be expressed through consumption when people purchased plates and glasses commemorating favorite rulers or causes.

The result of all these developments was a European economy vastly more complex, more specialized, more integrated, more commercialized, and more productive than anything the world had seen before. These developments necessarily affected the way people thought of the world and their place in it—above all, people in the Enlightenment shared a sense of living in a time marked by change. Many Enlightenment thinkers defended such changes as “progress.” Others were more critical, fearing that valued traditions were being lost. Such debates lay at the heart of Enlightenment thought.

The Foundations of the Enlightenment

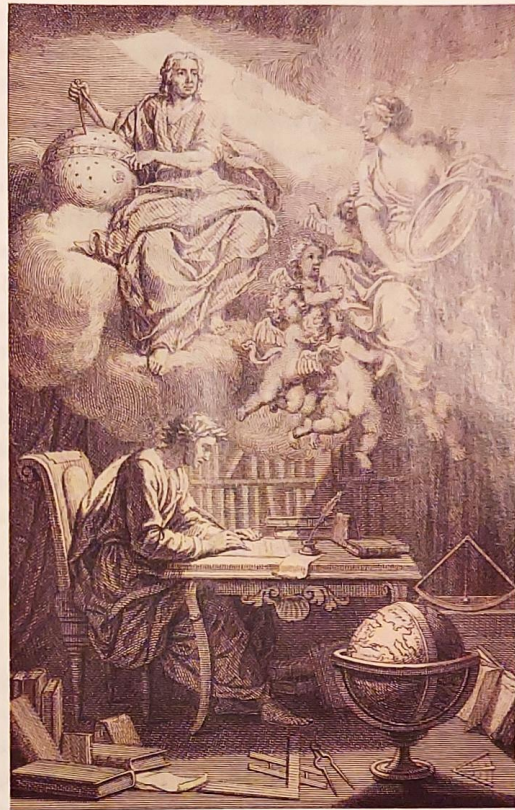
Enlightenment thinkers did not agree on everything, but most shared a sense that they lived in an exciting moment in history in which human reason would prevail over the accumulated superstitions and traditions of the past. Enlightenment authors believed themselves to be the defenders of a new ideal, “the party of humanity.”

The confidence that Enlightenment thinkers placed in the powers of human reason stemmed from the

accomplishments of the scientific revolution. Even when the details of Newton's physics were poorly understood, his methods provided a model for scientific inquiry into other phenomena. Nature operated according to laws that could be grasped by study, observation, and thought. The work of the Scottish writer David Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739–40, and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748) provided the most direct bridge from science to the Enlightenment. Newton had refused speculation about ultimate causes, arguing instead for a precise description of natural phenomena (see Chapter 16). Hume took this same rigor and skepticism to the study of morality, the mind, and government, often drawing analogies to scientific laws. Hume criticized the “passion for hypotheses and systems” that dominated earlier philosophical thinking. Experience and careful observation, he argued, usually did not support the premises on which those systems rested.

Embracing human reason also required confronting the power of Europe's traditional monarchies and the religious institutions that supported them. “Dare to know!” the German philosopher Immanuel Kant challenged his contemporaries in his classic 1784 essay “What Is Enlightenment?” For Kant, the Enlightenment represented a declaration of intellectual independence. Kant compared the intellectual history of humanity to the growth of a child. Enlightenment, in this view, was an escape from humanity's “self-imposed immaturity” and a long overdue break with humanity's self-imposed parental figure, the Catholic Church. Coming of age meant the “determination and courage to think without the guidance of someone else”—as an individual. Reason required autonomy, and freedom from tradition.

Enlightenment thinkers nevertheless recognized a great debt to their predecessors, especially John Locke, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton. Enlightenment thinkers drew heavily on Locke's studies of human knowledge, especially his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke's theories of how humans acquire knowledge gave education and environment a critical role in shaping human character. All knowledge, he argued, originates from sense perception. The human mind at birth is a “blank tablet” (in Latin, *tabula rasa*). Only when an infant begins to perceive the external world with its senses, does anything register in its mind. Education, then, was essential to the creation of a good and moral individual. Locke's starting point, which became a central premise for those who followed, was the goodness and perfectibility of humanity. Building on Locke, eighteenth-century thinkers made education central to their project, because education promised that social progress could be achieved through individual moral improvement. Locke's theories had potentially



DIVINE LIGHT. The frontispiece for Voltaire's book on the science of Isaac Newton portrays Newton as the source of a divine light that is reflected onto Voltaire's desk from a mirror held by Émilie du Châtelet, the French translator of Newton who also was Voltaire's lover. Newton's throne of clouds and the adoring angels holding du Châtelet aloft were familiar motifs from earlier generations of religious paintings, but the significance of the carefully portrayed ray of light is recast by the books, inkwell, and precise scientific measuring tools surrounding Voltaire. ■ **What does this image say about the relationship between religious thought and Enlightenment science?**

radical implications for eighteenth-century society: if all humans were capable of reason, education might also level hierarchies of status, sex, or race. As we will see, only a few Enlightenment thinkers made such egalitarian arguments. Still, optimism and a belief in universal human progress constituted a second defining feature of nearly all Enlightenment thinking.

Enlightenment thinkers sought nothing less than the organization of all knowledge. The *scientific method*, by which they meant the empirical observation of particular phenomena in order to arrive at general laws, offered a way to pursue research in all areas—to study human affairs as well as natural ones. Thus they collected evidence to learn

the laws governing the rise and fall of nations, and they compared governmental constitutions to deduce an ideal and universally applicable political system. Enlightenment thinkers took up a strikingly wide array of subjects in this systematic manner: knowledge and the mind, natural history, economics, government, religious beliefs, customs of indigenous peoples in the New World, human nature, and sexual (or what we would call gender) and racial differences.

As one can see from these examples, the culture of the *philosophes*, or Enlightenment thinkers, was international. French became the lingua franca of much Enlightenment discussion, but “French” books were often published in Switzerland, Germany, and Russia. Enlightenment thinkers admired British institutions and British scholarship, and Great Britain produced important ones: the historian Edward Gibbon and the Scottish philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith. The *philosophes* considered the Americans Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin to be a part of their group. Despite stiffer resistance from religious authorities, stricter state censors, and smaller networks of educated elites, the Enlightenment also flourished across central and southern Europe. Frederick II of Prussia hosted Voltaire during one of his exiles from France, and he also patronized a small but unusually productive group of Enlightenment thinkers. Northern Italy was also an important center of Enlightenment thought.

THE WORLD OF THE PHILOSOPHES

France nevertheless provided the stage for some of the most widely followed Enlightenment projects. For this reason, Enlightenment thinkers, regardless of where they lived, are often called by the French word *philosophes*. *Philosophe*, as used in the Enlightenment, simply meant “a freethinker,” a person whose reflections were unhampered by the constraints of religion or dogma in any form.

Voltaire

The best known of the *philosophes* was Voltaire, born François Marie Arouet (1694–1778). As Erasmus two centuries earlier had embodied Christian humanism, Voltaire personified the Enlightenment, commenting on an enormous range of subjects in a wide variety of literary forms. Educated by the Jesuits, he became a gifted and sharp-tongued writer. His gusto for provocation landed him in the Bastille (a notorious prison in Paris) for libel and

soon afterward in temporary exile in England. In his three years there, Voltaire became an admirer of British political institutions, British culture, and the ideas of Newton, Bacon, and Locke. His single greatest accomplishment may have been popularizing Newton's work in France and more generally championing the cause of British empiricism and the scientific method against the more Cartesian French.

Voltaire's themes were religious and political liberty, and his weapons were comparisons. His admiration for British culture and politics became a stinging critique of France—and other absolutist countries on the Continent. He praised British open-minded empiricism, respect for scientists, and support for research. He considered the relative weakness of the British aristocracy a sign of Britain's political health. Unlike the French, the British respected commerce and people who engage in it, Voltaire wrote. The British tax system was rational, free of the complicated exemptions for the privileged that were ruining French finances. The British House of Commons represented the middle classes and, in contrast with French absolutism, brought balance to British government and checked arbitrary power. In his “Letters on the English Nation,” Voltaire argued that violent revolution had actually produced political moderation and stability in Britain: “The idol of arbitrary power was drowned in seas of blood. . . . The English nation is the only nation in the world that has succeeded in moderating the power of its kings by resisting them.”

Of all Britain's reputed virtues, religious toleration loomed largest of all. Britain, Voltaire argued, brought together citizens of different religions in a harmonious and productive culture. In this and other instances, Voltaire oversimplified: British Catholics, Dissenters, and Jews did not have equal civil rights. Yet the British policy of “toleration” did contrast with Louis XIV's intolerance of Protestants. Revoking the Edict of Nantes (1685) had stripped French Protestants of civil rights and had helped create the atmosphere in which Jean Calas—and others—were persecuted.

Of all forms of intolerance, Voltaire opposed religious bigotry most, and with real passion he denounced religious fraud, faith in miracles, and superstition. His most famous battle cry was “*Écrasez l'infâme!*” (“Crush this infamous thing”), by which he meant all forms of repression, fanaticism, and bigotry. “The less superstition, the less fanaticism; and the less fanaticism, the less misery.” He did not oppose religion per se; rather, he sought to rescue morality, which he believed to come from God, from dogma—elaborate ritual, dietary laws, formulaic prayers—and from a powerful Church bureaucracy. He argued for common sense and simplicity, certain that these would bring out the goodness in humanity and establish stable authority.

Voltaire relished his position as a critic, and he was regularly exiled from France and other countries, his books banned and burned. As long as his plays attracted large audiences, however, the French king felt he had to tolerate their author. Voltaire had an attentive international public, including Frederick of Prussia, who invited him to his court at Berlin, and Catherine of Russia, with whom he corresponded about reforms she might introduce in Russia. When he died in 1778, a few months after a triumphant return to Paris, he was possibly the best-known writer in Europe.

Montesquieu

The Baron de Montesquieu (*mahn-tuhs-KYOO*, 1689–1755) was a very different kind of Enlightenment figure. Montesquieu was born to a noble family. He was not a stylist or a provocateur like Voltaire but a relatively cautious jurist, though he did write a satirical novel, *The Persian Letters* (1721), as a young man. The novel, which he published anonymously in Amsterdam, was composed as letters from two Persian visitors to France. The visitors detailed the odd religious superstitions they witnessed, compared manners at the French court with those in Turkish harems, and likened French absolutism to their own brands of *despotism*, or the abuse of government authority. *The Persian Letters* was an immediate best seller, which inspired many imitators, as other authors used the formula of a foreign observer to criticize contemporary French society.

Montesquieu's treatise, *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), may have been the most influential work of the Enlightenment. It was a groundbreaking study in what we would call comparative historical sociology and very Newtonian in its careful, empirical approach. Montesquieu asked about the structures that shaped law. How had different environments, histories, and religious traditions combined to create the variety of governmental institutions observable in the world? Why were there so many different forms of government: what spirit characterized each, and what were their respective virtues and shortcomings?

Montesquieu suggested that there were three basic forms of government: republics, monarchies, and despotisms. A republic was governed by many individuals—either an elite aristocracy of citizens or the people as a whole. The soul of a republic was virtue, which allowed individual citizens to transcend their particular interests and rule in accordance with the common good. In a monarchy, on the other hand, one person ruled in accordance with the law. The soul of a monarchy, wrote Montesquieu,

was honor, which gave individuals an incentive to behave with loyalty toward their sovereign. The third form of government, despotism, was rule by a single person unchecked by law or other powers. The soul of despotism was fear, since no citizen could feel secure and punishment took the place of education. Lest this seem abstract, Montesquieu devoted two chapters to the French monarchy, in which he spelled out what he saw as a dangerous drift toward despotism in his own land. Like other Enlightenment thinkers, Montesquieu admired the British system and its separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial functions of government. Such a balance of powers preserved liberty by avoiding a concentration of authority in a single individual or group. His idealization of “checks and balances” had a formative influence on Enlightenment political theorists and helped to guide the authors of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

Diderot and the Encyclopedia

The most remarkable and ambitious Enlightenment project was a collective one: the *Encyclopedia*. The *Encyclopedia* claimed to summarize all the most advanced contemporary philosophical, scientific, and technical knowledge, making it available to any reader. It demonstrated how scientific analysis could be applied in nearly all realms of thought, and it further aimed to encourage critical reflection of an enormous range of traditions and institutions. The guiding spirit behind the venture was another Frenchman, Denis Diderot (1713–1784). Diderot was helped by the mathematician Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (1717–1783) and other leading men of letters, including Voltaire and Montesquieu. Published in installments between 1751 and 1772, the *Encyclopedia* ran to seventeen large volumes of text and eleven more of illustrations, with over 71,000 articles.

Diderot commissioned articles on science and technology, showing how machines worked and illustrating new industrial processes. The point was to demonstrate how science could promote progress and alleviate human misery. Diderot turned the same methods to politics and the social order, including articles on economics, taxes, and the slave trade. Censorship made it difficult to write openly antireligious articles. Diderot thumbed his nose at religion in oblique ways; at the entry on the Eucharist, the reader found a terse cross-reference: “See *cannibalism*.” At one point, the French government revoked the publishing permit for the *Encyclopedia*, declaring in 1759 that the encyclopedists were trying to “propagate materialism”

(by which they meant atheism), “to destroy Religion, to inspire a spirit of independence, and to nourish the corruption of morals.” The volumes sold remarkably well despite such bans and their hefty price. Purchasers belonged to the elite: aristocrats, government officials, prosperous merchants, and a scattering of members of the higher clergy. That elite stretched across Europe, including its overseas colonies.

Although the French philosophes sparred with the state and the church, they sought political stability and reform. Montesquieu hoped that an enlightened aristocracy would press for reforms and defend liberty against a despotic king. Voltaire, persuaded that aristocrats would represent only their particular narrow interests, looked to an enlightened monarch for leadership. Neither was a democrat, and neither conceived of reform from below. Still, their widely read critiques of arbitrary power stung. By the 1760s, the French critique of despotism provided the language in which many people across Europe articulated their opposition to existing regimes.

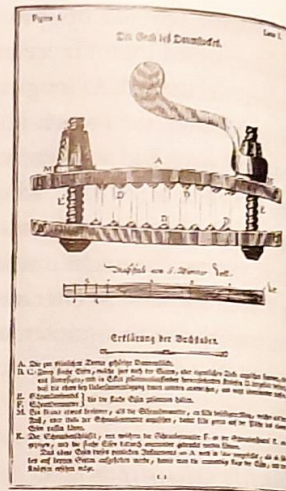
MAJOR THEMES OF ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT

Enlightenment thinkers across Europe raised similar themes: humanitarianism, or the dignity and worth of all individuals; religious toleration; and liberty. These ideals inspired important debates about three issues in particular: law and punishment, the place of religious minorities, and the state’s relationship to society and the economy.

Law and Punishment

Enlightenment beliefs about education and the perfectibility of human society led many thinkers to question the harsh treatment of criminals by European courts. An influential work by the Italian jurist Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794), *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), provided Voltaire with most of his arguments in the Calas case. Beccaria criticized the use of arbitrary power and attacked the prevalent view that punishments should represent society’s vengeance on the criminal. Instead, he insisted, the only legitimate rationale for punishment was to maintain social order and to prevent other crimes. Beccaria argued that respect for individual dignity dictated that humans should punish other humans no more than is absolutely necessary.

Above all, Beccaria’s book eloquently opposed torture and the death penalty. Public execution, he argued, was



INSTRUMENTS OF TORTURE. A man being stretched on the rack (left), and a thumbscrew (right), both from an official Austrian government handbook. By 1800, Beccaria’s influence had helped phase out the use of such instruments.

intended to dramatize the power of the state and the horrors of hell, but it dehumanized the victim, judge, and spectators. In 1766, a few years after the Calas case, another French trial provided an example of what horrified Beccaria and the philosophes. A nineteen-year-old French nobleman, convicted of blasphemy, had his tongue cut out and his hand cut off before he was burned at the stake. The court discovered the blasphemer had read Voltaire, and it ordered his *Philosophical Dictionary* burned along with the body. Sensational cases such as this helped publicize Beccaria’s work. *On Crimes and Punishments* was quickly translated into a dozen languages. Owing primarily to its influence, most European countries by around 1800 abolished torture, branding, whipping, and mutilation, and reserved the death penalty for capital crimes.

Humanitarianism and Religious Toleration

Humanitarianism and reason also counseled religious toleration. Enlightenment thinkers spoke almost as one on the need to end religious warfare and the persecution of heretics and religious minorities. Most Enlightenment authors distinguished between religious belief, which they accepted, and the Church as an institution and as dogma, which they rebelled against. It was in this sense that Voltaire opposed the Church’s influence over society. Few Enlightenment authors were atheists—a notable exception was Paul-Henri d’Holbach (1723–1789)—and only a few more were agnostics. Many, including Voltaire, were deists, believing in a God that acted as a “divine

watchmaker" who at the beginning of time constructed a perfect universe and left it to run with predictable regularity. Enlightenment inquiry proved compatible with very different stances on religion.

Nevertheless, Enlightenment support for toleration was sometimes limited. Most Christians of the era saw Jews as heretics and Christ killers. Although Enlightenment thinkers deplored persecution, they commonly viewed Judaism and Islam as backward, superstitious religions. One of the few Enlightenment figures to treat Jews sympathetically was the German philosophe Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781). Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise* (1779) takes place in Jerusalem during the Fourth Crusade and begins with a pogrom—a violent, orchestrated attack—in which the wife and children of Nathan, a Jewish merchant, are murdered. Nathan survives to become a sympathetic and wise father figure. He adopts a Christian-born daughter

and raises her with three religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. At several points, authorities ask him to choose the single true religion. Nathan shows none exists. The three great monotheistic religions are three versions of the truth. Religion is authentic, or true, only insofar as it makes the believer virtuous.

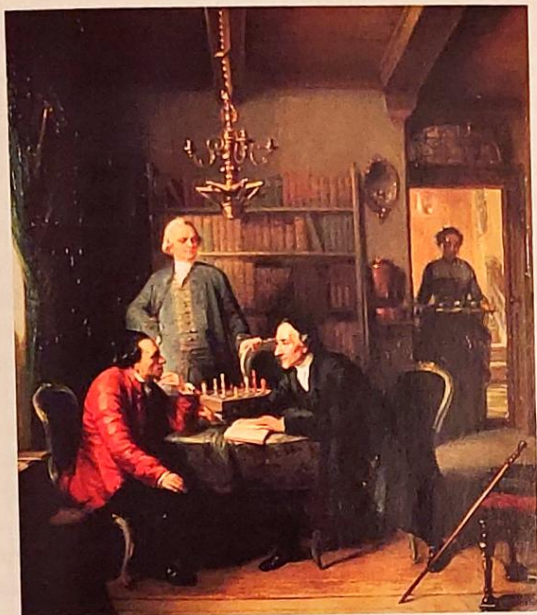
Lessing modeled his hero on his friend Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), a self-educated rabbi and bookkeeper (and the grandfather of the composer Felix Mendelssohn). Moses Mendelssohn moved—though with some difficulty—between the Enlightenment circles of Frederick II and the Jewish community of Berlin. Repeatedly attacked and pressured to convert to Christianity, he defended Jewish communities against anti-Semitic policies and Judaism against Enlightenment criticism. At the same time, he also promoted reform within the Jewish community, arguing that his community had special reason to embrace the broad Enlightenment project: religious faith should be voluntary, states should promote tolerance, humanitarianism would bring progress to all.

Government, Administration, and the Economy

Enlightenment ideas had a very real influence over affairs of state. The philosophes defended reason and knowledge for humanitarian reasons. But they also promised to make nations stronger, more efficient, and more prosperous. Beccaria's proposed legal reforms were a good case in point; he sought to make laws not simply more just but also more effective. In other words, the Enlightenment spoke to individuals but also to states. The philosophes addressed issues of liberty and rights but also took up matters of administration, tax collection, and economic policy.

The rising fiscal demands of eighteenth-century states and empires made these issues newly urgent. Which economic resources were most valuable to states? In the seventeenth century, mercantilists had argued that regulation of trade was necessary to maximize government revenues (see Chapter 15). In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment economic thinkers known as the physiocrats argued that real wealth came from the land and agricultural production, which prospered with less government interference. They advocated simplifying the tax system and following a policy of *laissez-faire*, which comes from the French expression *laissez faire la nature* ("let nature take its course"), letting wealth and goods circulate without government interference.

The classic expression of *laissez-faire* economics, however, came from the Scottish economist Adam Smith



LESSING AND MENDELSSOHN. This painting of a meeting between the philosophe Gotthold Lessing (standing) and his friend Moses Mendelssohn (seated right) emphasizes the personal nature of their intellectual relationship, which transcended their religious backgrounds (Christian and Jewish, respectively). The Enlightenment's atmosphere of earnest discussion is invoked both by the open book before them and the shelf of reading material behind Lessing. Compare this image of masculine discussion (note the role of the one woman in the painting) with the image of the aristocratic salon on page 467 and the coffeehouse on page 468. ■ **What similarities and differences might one point to in these various illustrations of the Enlightenment public sphere?**

(1723–1790) and his landmark treatise, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith disagreed with the physiocrats on the value of agriculture, but he shared their opposition to mercantilism. For Smith, the central issues were the productivity of labor and how labor was used in different sectors of the economy. Mercantile restrictions—such as high taxes on imported goods, one of the grievances of the colonists throughout Europe's American empires—did not encourage the productive deployment of labor and thus did not create real economic health. For Smith, general prosperity would only result by allowing individuals to pursue their own interests by buying and selling goods and labor freely on the open market. Producers who charged too much for their goods, or laborers who demanded more than their neighbor in wages, would be driven by the force of competition to either lower their prices or face ruin and unemployment. Competition, in his formulation, was the “invisible hand” that made markets efficient.

The Wealth of Nations spelled out, in more technical and historical detail, the different stages of economic development, how the invisible hand actually worked, and the beneficial aspects of competition. Its perspective owed much to Newton and to the Enlightenment's idealization of both nature and human nature. Smith thought of himself as the champion of liberty against state-sponsored economic privilege and monopolies. And he became the most influential of the new eighteenth-century economic thinkers. In the following century, his work and his followers became the target of reformers and critics who had less faith in the power of markets to generate wealth and prosperity for all.

EMPIRE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The colonial world loomed large in Enlightenment thinking. Many Enlightenment thinkers saw the Americas as an uncorrupted territory where humanity's natural simplicity was expressed in the lives of native peoples. In comparison, Europe and Europeans appeared decadent or corrupt. European colonial activities—especially the slave trade—raised pressing issues about humanitarianism, individual rights, and natural law. The effects of colonialism on Europe were a central Enlightenment theme.

Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* that the “discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind.” At roughly the same moment, a French writer, the abbé Guillaume Thomas François Raynal published the massive *Philosophical*

and Political History of European Settlements and Trade in the Two Indies (1770). This work, a coauthored collection like the *Encyclopedia*, was one of the most widely read works of the Enlightenment, going through twenty printings and at least forty pirated editions. Raynal drew his inspiration from the *Encyclopedia* and aimed at nothing less than a total history of colonization: customs and civilizations of indigenous peoples, natural history, exploration, and commerce in the Atlantic world and India.

Raynal asked whether colonization had made humanity happier, more peaceful, or better. The question was fully in the spirit of the Enlightenment. So was the answer: Raynal believed that industry and trade brought improvement and progress. Like other Enlightenment writers, however, he and his coauthors considered natural simplicity an antidote to the corruptions of civilized culture. They sought out and idealized what they considered examples of “natural” humanity, many of them in the New World. What Europeans considered savage life might be “a hundred times preferable to that of societies corrupted by despotism,” and they lamented the loss of humanity's “natural liberty.” They condemned the tactics of the Spanish in Mexico and Peru, of the Portuguese in Brazil, and of the British in North America. In the New World, they argued, Europeans found themselves with virtually unlimited power, which encouraged them to be arrogant, cruel, and despotic. In a later edition, after the outbreak of the American Revolution, the book went even further, drawing parallels between exploitation in the colonial world and inequality at home: “We are mad in the way we act with our colonies, and inhuman and mad in our conduct toward our peasants,” asserted one author.

Such critiques did little, however, to check the growing importance of colonial commerce in the eighteenth century. The wealth generated by colonial trade tied the interests of governments and transoceanic merchants in an increasingly tight embrace. As this colonial trade grew in importance, no issue challenged Enlightenment thinkers as much as the institution of slavery.

Slavery and the Atlantic World

The Atlantic slave trade (see Chapter 14) reached its peak in the eighteenth century. European slave traders sent at least 1 million Africans into New World slavery in the late seventeenth century, and at least 6 million in the eighteenth century. Control of the slave trade became fundamental to great-power politics in Europe during this period, as the British used their dominance of the trade to their advantage in their long-running competition with France.